

LEO UITTENBOGAARD



JOZEF



A Life in Two Worlds



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TRANSLATION BY O. V. GUNDLACH

OF THE BOOK

JEUS

BY LEO UITTENBOGAARD

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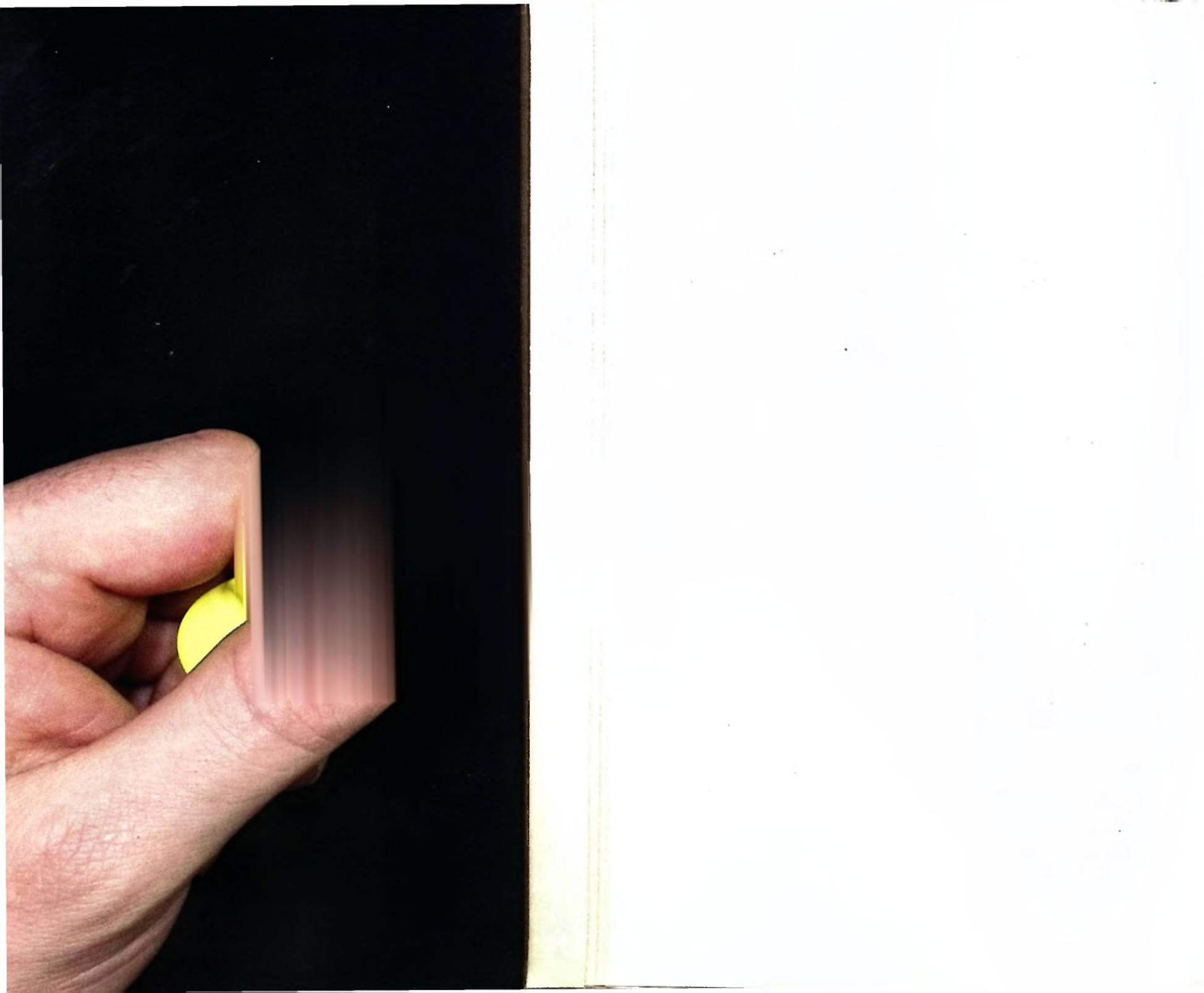
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Leo Uittenbogaard is writing here about the childhood of the man whom many of you already know: Jozef Rulof.

The background of this spiritual leader is as fascinating as the man himself, and the story of Jozef—or “JEUS” as they say for “Jozef” in Gelderland—is not only authentic biography, it is a wondrous tale of adventure and of spiritual beauty.

THE PUBLISHERS



This book is dedicated to Crisje, the dear, courageous and valiant mother of Jeus. She does not know that I am writing all the big and small and sometimes even strange happenings of her beautiful, rich life into this book.

But, when she reads these pages she'll see the gratitude of her Hendrik, of Miets and Jeus, and of her other children, for all the love she has given them. Each one of them has helped me in his own way in writing this book. Knowing this, Crisje will surely forgive me that I am disclosing her life here before loving, though strange, eyes.

THE AUTHOR

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JOZEF

A Life in Two Worlds



CHAPTER ONE

They are expecting a baby . . .



OLD MAN WINTER IS A CURIOUS FELLOW. WITH LONG STEPS he crosses the Lowlands. When he comes, the people run from the streets into their houses. He is so rough that he takes almost your breath away, but then, as if to make up for this, he goes and paints beautiful, fantastic flowers on your windowpanes.

His icy breath freezes the water in river and pond, and soon the people come out again, thankful, happy; they

put on their skates and write their names on the smooth ice in elegant lines. And the "cold oldster" looks on and now he renews his efforts to chase them all back into their houses again, but it doesn't work, they keep on skating, frolicking, so that Mr. Winter, the jealous old rascal, gets angry and bounces with his head into the low grey clouds until the white flakes and tufts come falling down to earth.

"Look, it's snowing," cry the two Wageman children who are pressing their noses against the windows and see how the village is putting on a white jacket.

Soon there is so much snow that skating becomes impossible and, disappointed, everybody goes home. Even the children, chilled to their little bones, stop sliding on the ice strips. And now the wind is starting in. Like a playful young dog he hurries through the falling flakes and burrows under the white layer on the earth so that the snow flies 'round and 'round like fine sugar dust.

The people who are out of doors because they have to be, see nothing of the beauty around them. With their coat collars crimped up they walk looking down on the ground before them, to avoid sliding and falling. Even the oldest people cannot remember such a severe winter, and that's something.

"The stork won't be able to get through in this weather," says Jan to his little brother, wiping the frozen window with a warm cloth and peeping through a gap in the ice flowers.

Bernard, too, has his doubts. When daddy comes home, they'll ask him if he has seen the stork, the stork with the little baby in his beak. Suddenly Jan gets up and with his little legs he climbs up the steep stairs that lead to the attic. There he looks out of the window. Bernard who is

younger is not allowed to go up there. He lets himself drop down on the floor.

"The ol' longlegs isn't coming yet. If he only can find our house in all this snow," his little brother is calling down from up there, and on Bernard's little forehead a worried wrinkle springs up. But somebody comes, and that is Aunt Trui who keeps house for the Wagemans while Ma Wageman is in childbed. Aunt Trui is not as nice as mother, no, the children don't like her at all, not a bit!

Jan has to come downstairs. "But I'm doing it for mother," cries he angrily. Aunt Trui shrugs her shoulders and disappears into the kitchen. The children stand again before the window, their arms slung around each other. Jan is still sobbing a little. "Stop crying, heh?" says Bernard in a consoling way and he nudges his little brother on the sly. The little human beings are feeling lonely. They want to go to mother but Aunt Trui won't let them. If only daddy would come now, and the stork. . . .

"Have you heard mother cry already?" asks Jan.

"Does mother have to cry, then?" Bernard wants to know.

"That's what they say, I've heard that the stork'll bite mother in the leg, but he's bringing the little baby then, see?"

An hour has gone by. Suddenly Jan is grabbing his little brother by the arm. "Daddy," says he. They listen together with eyes wide open, their heads slanted to one side. Yes, that's right,—it's father. Nobody can make such long steps as daddy. That's why they call him in the village "Big Long Hendrik." He's over six feet tall, their daddy, and they're pretty proud of it. Now they can hear him open the little gate, there, he's coming through the garden now,

he's tapping his shoes against the brickwall to knock the snow off. And now he is standing in the door, coming into the house.

Cheering, as if freed from all worries, the children run towards him. "Daddy!" But he's not picking them up with his strong arms as usual. He pushes them aside and almost running, he rushes to the room where Mother Crisje is lying. One glance, and he knows already.

"Dammit, Cris, don't it take awful long this time? Come on, now, don't look at me so, will you? It's O.K., I shan't say 'dammit' any more—" He bends over his wife and gives her a hearty kiss and the whole room seems to be filled now with his long body and his eager talk. In a grandiose manner he takes a bottle of wine out of the inner pocket of his jacket and says:

"We shall pour ourselves a small glassful, that'll help when the little fellow comes."

Crisje looks at him long and seriously, and Wageman doesn't feel comfortable under her stare; he is shifting from one foot to the other and does not even notice the children any more who have followed him into the room.

"You better take care of the boys, first," says Crisje at last, "then you can come back to me." The bottle of wine has aroused her suspicion.

Aunt Trui wants to bring the bottle to the kitchen, but Hendrik won't let her: "Leave it alone, Trui, I'll do that myself. Leave that bottle right here, I'll be back anyway."

And suddenly the atmosphere is charged with hatred, as happens every time when Aunt Trui thinks that the big long fellow is bossing her. She is flushed with anger but Wageman is already busy with the children whom he is herding out of the room, and soon the two women can

hear him talking to the little boys as he is undressing them.

Trui is tidying up the room. She does it brusquely and unwillingly. No, she won't take that, not from anybody, surely not from Big Long Hendrik. They ought to be happy to have her. What would they do without her, well, what?

Crisje follows her sister with her eyes. She is shaking her head, but she says nothing, it would only aggravate the situation, she knows her Trui.

Hendrik opens the door halfway and sticks his head in: "You might as well go home now, Trui, I'll get along by myself, and tomorrow we'll see you back, heh? Just go home now, Trui." And he has already disappeared behind the closed door. It sounded somewhat hostile, the way he said it, and it made Crisje feel uneasy. Trui is so excited that she is biting her lips, but she pretends that she has not heard what Hendrik has said, and, in a sugary way she says to her sister:

"What say, Cris, think I can go now? Hendrik can help himself. You know when you'll need me. Then you can count on me. Is there anything I can do 'fore I go? How about some more hot water bottles?"

"Thank you very much, Trui, but Hendrik can do all this. Gradus will be coming home soon, too, won't he?" There is a warm sincerity in Crisje's voice, as if she'd want to give her sister better and kinder thoughts to think. But Trui doesn't even answer any more, she's leaving the house already, closing the outer door with a bang.

Mother Crisje sighs and makes the sign of the cross. If the two sisters only could understand each other a little better. . . .

"So, now I'll take care of you, Cris; the boys have had

their supper and are in bed. Now I can start with you. Has Trui left?" The long fellow enters the room noisily, his long limbs make it hard for him to move about quietly.

"Yes, she's gone, Hendrik," says Crisje, and then she continues, a little bit annoyed: "Why are you always so nasty to her, Hendrik; she hasn't done anything bad, has she? She takes such good care and is always right there to help me."

"Aw, I know all that. As long as there's something to get out of us she'll come." His voice is not friendly any more, it is gruff and biting.

"That's not true, Hendrik, you mustn't knock anybody's crown off his head. I don't like that. You shall love your neighbor, that's what Our Dear Lord says."

"Sure, Cris, I know that too. But I know her by now, Aunt Trui—we know her longer than one day, heh?—She's begrudging it to us, and especially to me . . . she'd rather have one of her own; believe me, Crisje, she's begrudging us the children."

The woman who is running home with a woollen cloth around her head is also thinking of children. "She can have babies, why not I? The long fellow?—Bah!" She trembles, and it is not from the cold, now. It is the sorrow of a woman who cannot have children. Her body is growing, she's healthy and quick, but all this won't help her and she knows it. That's what she's brooding over and it is poisoning her mind, her very blood. And so she cannot have enough love to be happy with the children of someone else, even with those of her own sister. She can't, she just can't. And now she's home and she slams the door behind her and hurries to prepare the supper for Gradus who doesn't like to be kept waiting.

Mother Crisje doesn't like to believe in the ill-will of others. Hendrik has been talking about Trui, and Crisje is saying:

"Don't say that, Hendrik; she's still young, she may still have babies."

"She and children,—ha, don't make me laugh. Believe me, Cris, if I'm not mistaken . . . Here, Crisje, don't cry so much, now. Soon you'll be needing all your strength. Here, have a little drink, that'll make you feel better, and forget about Trui."

"Be a little nicer to the poor thing, Hendrik. That would make me so happy and I couldn't wish for anything better. Will you do that for me?"

"Sure, dear; you know how to plead for others, Cris." He sits down on the edge of the bed, his mouth one large grin. Crisje takes a sip of wine.

"Did the boss give you the wine, Hendrik?" Again the long fellow feels uncomfortable under those questioning eyes. He does not answer and is looking down upon his shoes. Then he says with a faked show of interest: "Tastes good, heh?" But Crisje has not forgotten her question:

"Tell me now, did you get the wine as a present, or did you . . . take it?" But she knows the answer already, she knows her Hendrik.

"Why, you shouldn't do that, Hendrik. You must not steal. And then,—suppose you're found out, Hendrik. Then you'll lose your job. And then what?" But Hendrik makes light of this. He says: "The boss doesn't see anything, nothing at all." And with a cunning little smile he adds: "And don't you yourself always say that when one has much, one should give half of it to the poor?"

"No, no, that's not what I said. It reads like this: He

who gives what he has is worthy of his life. But this here is stolen wine, and 'thou shalt not steal.' Suppose, now, Hendrik, Our Dear Lord should punish you and take our child back to Him. What would you say then?"

"That cannot happen." Big Long Hendrik rejects this warning in his easy-going way.

"Yes, that's what you say but if Our Dear Lord should punish you anyway then you wouldn't even have a Jeus—if it's a boy, or a Miets—if it's a girl. And that may happen, Hendrik. You're as careless as could be. Can't you believe me?"

His answer comes back fast, too fast for Crisje:

"I'll think it over, Cris. Right away I can't make up my mind."

Now she abandons her efforts, she sees that she cannot change him. Anyway, he is old enough to know what he's doing. As he now looks into her eyes he sees the sunshine of her smile there, and then he, too, laughs loud and heartily. They are holding hands and this is the expression of their immense love.

"Why didn't you leave the children a little while with me? I haven't said good night to them yet."

"Tomorrow night you'll say good night to them again, Cris, and there are many more days coming. Do you feel something now?"

"Yes, it comes and goes, it always goes away again. I can't understand it, it didn't take that long with the other two children. I don't know much about these things; if only everything goes well,—I'm so worried."

Then they sit silent for a long time. Outside the ice cold wind is sweeping the snow high against the window. They harken to the silver trickle on the glass panes and the

warm happiness within them is growing. Outside the elements are raging while here inside they have their beautiful secret. How much longer is it going to remain a secret? They long to see the new life, to hold it in their arms at last, and it makes them impatient.

"And what did the doctor say, Cris?"

"He's lost track of the time altogether. Mina is coming soon. She doesn't know it either. The baby should have come long ago." And to vex him a bit, and also to hide her own restlessness she adds with a smile:

"That's what you get for it. You should not steal."

And Hendrik, too, wants to shake off his unrest that has come suddenly over him.

"Cris," says he, "Cris, shall I play my violin a bit? If it is a child with a musical talent and he hears me play, maybe he'll come a little faster and won't let his father and mother wait so long."

"A nice father that boy's getting, really."

"Aw, stop it now, will you, Cris? You want me to change too fast. I cannot change over night, can I? and then,—life is still so long."

"You mustn't say that, Hendrik. We're just beings of today. That's what the priest, Father Reenen, told us in his sermon so beautifully last week. I shall never forget it, heh? How did he say it again?"

"I thought," says Big Long Hendrik, "that you could never forget it, and now you cannot even remember it." On his face there is a friendly smirk.

"That comes from the pains I have, Hendrik, and it is getting worse now."

"Should I then play a little on my violin, Cris?"

Mother Cris is looking at her big man and suddenly

the tears are rushing into her eyes. Hendrik is seeing it and it is as if a gust of warm air is hitting his cheeks.

"Why are you crying now, Cris? Because of the child for which I want to play? Don't you want me to, Cris? Well, just say so. I shall do what you want me to do. You know that, don't you?" He doesn't find it hard to speak softly, the long fellow, and as Crisje is asking him, "Give me a kiss, Hendrik," he bends his big body over her, as if she were a child, very carefully.

"What do you think, Cris, is it going to be a girl?"

"I think that it's a boy, Hendrik."

"With the other two you knew it too, Crisje. So then we can count on a boy. But then we'll have to have whiskey. Then we'll have to have a drink. Shall I now play a little, Crisje? You shall see, Crisje, if he can hear me, he'll come right away."

The tall man gets up and fetches his violin from the case; holding the instrument under his arm he is standing there. He is still thinking of the child that is hesitating to come out from his warm, secure place, into this cold world.

"If it should be a girl, Cris, shouldn't we call her after you? Who else has the name Christine in the family?"

"My late grandmother, and she was a good woman; yet, she had also the name Maria. If it is a girl, shall we call her then Maria?"

"All right, Cris, but if it is a boy, we'll call him after me. But not my first name; my second name: Jozef, and we shall call him then Jeus and leave it at that."

He takes his instrument, leans the sheet music against the coffee pot and starts tuning. It is not such a good violin, and when he will be in the money, some day, he'll buy

himself a real good one, sure. The boys, too, shall have good instruments then. Each one of them shall learn something. He is pulling his long fingers until they make a cracking noise and then he begins to play.

And now the soft notes of the "Ave Maria" are sounding in the room.

Crisje has heard this piece already a thousand times, yet each time she listens anew with full devotion, especially now in her hour of expectancy. Her eyes are going through the room and remain fixed at last upon the pictures of Our Good Lord and of Mary and Joseph that are standing on the chest of drawers between two candles.

Crisje folds her hands upon the fullness of her body. Her physical discomfort is only enhancing the feeling of peace and happiness that is rising within her. She is a mother, she is contemplating, a mother just as She was a mother once, She who has carried the child of God. Crisje is praying the simple and beautiful words of the Ave Maria and this prayer and the music are breathing the spiritual purity of this hour.

He is musical, Big Long Hendrik is, and he has a marvelous voice, a crystal clear, mighty tenor. As the first singer in the choir he is attracting the people to the church. Even from the neighboring villages they are coming to hear him, and therefore Hendrik is in good standing with the village priest. Many a prize has been won by the male quartet which he has organized. With his big stature, his character-head, with his handsome moustache and the little pointed beard he makes a good appearance. His manners are frank and sincere, his eyes have a true shine and he is the soul of all such plans and enterprises. He is a real gentleman, his friends say, yes, he might as well be a baron

and he should really live in the city instead of this forsaken village. He is working for a wine dealer in Emmerik, but in his spare time he is also working as a waiter, although only in the best of restaurants, of course; and then he has a little trade in pictures where he goes out calling on people soliciting orders for enlargements of their photographs and those of their dead relatives. In this way he is earning a fairly good livelihood so that he can keep the wolf from the door for Crisje and his family. It is only too bad that he has to be away from home so much in all these activities, because Crisje is so happy when he is at home with her.

Now as he is playing, his eyes are leaving the music page for a moment; he knows the piece by heart anyway, and as he is looking at his wife, a smile is spreading over his face; she is listening so gratefully. Crisje is a saint, he is thinking, and he remembers how happy he was once when the village priest told him that his Crisje was one in a million, that he should be grateful to God for having entrusted such a good soul to him. Crisje is everything for him. She is his wife, his pal and a real good mother to his children. True, sometimes he is angry at her when she is giving away to the poor more than she can really afford, but deep in his heart he is happy about it.

Lost in these thoughts he has started to repeat his favorite piece of music. Suddenly he cries: "Oh, darnit, that I did not think of it." He stops playing and blurts out:

"Cris, I still have to go somewhere quickly."

"Where do you have to go at such a late hour? It is almost nine o'clock and Mina has to be here soon. She had to go to Mrs. Daaldes first who is further than I."

"I just have to run over to Jan Hieltjes with the enlargement of the picture of his father."

"You surely want a couple of drinks, heh?" says Crisje in order to hide her disappointment.

"And if that were true, you wouldn't have anything against it, would you?" is his answer and he kisses her on both cheeks.

"Not at all, Hendrik; you know that very well. But don't stay away too long. Any time now, you know, the great event may happen. The pain is increasing now. Aren't you afraid that you may be back too late?"

He is standing already in the door. "No, Cris, I'll be right back. It's just the enlargement, that's all." The door is closing and Crisje hears the long steps growing fainter.

Yes, what is going on in the mind of a woman as she is lying in bed in a warm room and is feeling the sharp but happy pain which is reminding her every minute of the great miracle to come?

The rich sensations which the child within her is extending to the mother and which are blending with her own soul make her feel grateful to God and mild towards other human beings. Thus her thoughts are a pure prayer which does not have to be expressed in words.

Crisje is thinking of her Hendrik. It's funny, but that's the way he is: Now he is here with you and now he's gone again. And yet, he is such a good man. And how beautifully he played! And then his voice! Many girls had their eyes on him, but she had been the lucky winner. Oh, how she thanked her Dear Good Lord. Wasn't she the happiest woman in the whole wide world? But why just she? If only he wouldn't have to go away so much. No, she couldn't expect that. She wanted everything too perfect. The Dear

Lord, wasn't He good enough to her? She lived in her own little house, although it had taken all their savings, and she'd have to pay two guilders every week for a long, long time, but she had no worries. Twenty-five years it would take to make this their property, but five years had already passed.

Crisje thinks of her children, of Bernard, and of Jan who is so deep, so full of feeling. And they should have now a little brother, or maybe a little sister. How happy they'll be!

"They have been really neglected these last few days, the poor tots," thinks Crisje sadly. Trui has forbidden them to come into her room. After all, where could they find better advice with all the questions and little problems that came up in their heads during these long days? It was only in the evenings that they could see their father, and then just for a few minutes only, not long enough to tell him of all the wonderful things they had seen and experienced during the day. And Aunt Trui,—well, they were afraid of her. . . . "Believe me, Cris, she is begrudging you your children,"—these words are still ringing in her ears, causing her actual pain. She knows what faults Aunt Trui has, but she is not condemning her for it. She is not very loving, she's bursting with greed and will start a quarrel for nothing. The people in the village don't like her very much, they actually shun her. These people don't try to understand her.

Even her husband does not go to the trouble to look into her soul. They both go their own ways and the only thing that Gradus is interested in is a good meal. He sings, Gradus does, but Hendrik calls it the "squealing of a fat

pig." And in the meantime the two people become more and more estranged.

Aunt Trui tells everybody who wants to listen that it is terrible to have children, not only because of the pain that the mother has to suffer, but also because of the sorrows and worries in bringing them up later. Crisje knows better. She can understand why she is coming back to her again and again, even after Hendrik has shown her the door once because of her talking and gossiping. It is because of the warmth in a house with children, because of the harmony there and because of the prattle of the little ones.

The bitterness not to have any of her own has built a high wall around her heart. Now she is hard and lonesome. No, she cannot condemn Trui, she even likes her in spite of everything. For the woman who has the desire to be a mother cannot be bad, thinks Crisje. One should really love Trui, indeed.

"Well, Cris, how are we doing today?" It is Mina Voort who has entered and is saying in the same breath: "Mrs. Daaldes had a girl. Cris, Cris, how happy they were, I cannot tell you. And it was easy, too. But I cannot understand why it is taking so long with you. Has the labor started, or haven't you felt anything yet? Let me look, Aunty Cris."

"What do you say, Mina, can it be much longer?"

"You mean it should have been all over by now. You must have been counting wrong. It looks as if it is of no use for me to wait. But you know yourself, when I'm waiting here nothing happens, and as soon as I'll go, it'll start. But that's also good, in a way, otherwise Our Good Lord wouldn't have anything to say any more. You know that yourself."

Mina Voort is not in a hurry to go; she likes to be with people. The love that is dwelling in her heart makes it easy for her to get along with all kinds of people. And this is important in her work. How many children she has already brought into this world she has clear forgotten, but some of them are wearing now long pants and smoke and spit, yes, many of them are now thinking of getting married.

Mother Crisje at last is coming out with the question that is on her mind all the time:

"Do you think that it is going to be a boy, Mina?"

"Yes, Crisje, I'm absolutely sure. You know that in the last days before the birth I can always feel what it is going to be, and I'm always right, in spite of what the doctor says, and you know also that he would not bet with me any more. You'll have a boy, Auntie Cris, and those that take so long in coming are usually 'special' children. I am ready to bet my very life. You know that my mother also could foretell, but how we got that way, nobody knows." And Mina has a mysterious expression on her face as she is saying this.

"That's a gift from Our Good Lord, Mina. What He's to give is always good, Mina, even if the people don't see it that way. If they'd ever get it into their heads that God would do what *they* want, then they would lose all their respect for Him. But there is Hendrik now."

He is already in the room.

"You are going to have your Jeus, and you will see that he is going to be something special. And he's going to be here on a Sunday, that is tomorrow. I have no more doubts about it." Mina is saying this with a clear voice.

"Darn it, Cris, if that is true then I'll go and get a few bottles,—we have to have a drink on that."

But now Crisje is objecting: "You can do that tomorrow in the morning just as well. Won't you stay home at last so that we can go to sleep?"

Mina knows her people. Underneath Long Hendrik's ostentatious boisterousness she can discern his worry, and as she is standing with him some time later at the outside door she says encouragingly to him:

"Don't you worry, Hendrik, Crisje is not going to leave you. Good night, Hendrik."

Hendrik remains at the door for some time. It has stopped snowing. He's looking up to the sky where all these stars are twinkling. The street is empty. No sound anywhere. It is as if the snow had covered up all sounds and noises. Hendrik is shivering. He closes the door. Shall this suspense come to an end at last—tomorrow?—

"Is there still anything you'd like to have, Cris?"

"No, Hendrik, just put a glass of milk on the table and then we can go to sleep. Tomorrow is going to be another day. And what a day!"

Hendrik kisses her. Then he is lying down full length next to her. Nothing is said any more, but the thoughts that are in their heads do not let them go to sleep yet.

In this hour, now that night has fallen upon earth, the questions are flying around in the dark room like black birds. They are soaring to the ceiling and searching for the window which is their way out into space, to the Universe where there is freedom and knowledge.

Are they going to hold the child in their arms tomorrow? Is he going to be healthy? And the mother, too? What

shall his life be like? Shall they be able to do their duty towards the new life that God is entrusting to them? These questions are disquieting for the moment, until rest comes over them—and confidence.

"Crisje, brave little Crisje," thinks Hendrik. He feels for her hand and presses it softly. And this token makes her strong and helps her to overcome her fear, the fear that is in her now that she is going on that dark trip through blood and pains which, however, shall lead her to that new young life which she is creating.

CHAPTER TWO

*“He is an unusual child,
you’ll see . . .”*

THE NIGHT HAS PASSED, AND SO HAS MORNING AND NOON and still—no child.

Big Long Hendrik has already been out this morning to get some wine and liquor, and whomever he has met on the way he has invited to come and see his youngest son, “a ‘special’ one,” just as Mina had foretold. “So between one and four,” he has told them. That’s when the little fellow would be there. But as the friends and peasants come to his door around that time, Big Long Hendrik has to confess that the child has not yet come. In a way of consolation he admits them to the parlor and offers each one a drink, and then another one: to the health of mother and child. They leave with the best of wishes. Hendrik goes back to his wife. The doctor and Mina are there and they look at each other in surprise. They cannot understand it. And a little later the doctor leaves, shaking his head.

The children are standing today at the windows again, to look out for the stork. Jan tries to explain why that bird hasn’t come yet. The chimney hasn’t been cleaned properly, or maybe the stork thinks that it is too cold for a little baby and that he’d rather wait until it’s warmer outside.

Bernard is sucking his thumb and acts as if he were believing all this, but the sorrowful wrinkles have not yet disappeared from his little forehead.

Tonight they shall still not be able to see the new baby. Here comes Auntie Trui already to put them into bed. As she is undressing the children they feel very much disappointed. They are not prattling together as usual, but they cannot fall asleep, either. The clock on the steeple is striking ten.

Suddenly Jan is standing up in bed: "Did you hear it, Bernard? Mother cried . . . Now the stork has bitten her in the leg. What a nasty bird, heh?"

"I hear nothing," says Bernard. He's sitting up in bed now, too. The children are listening together. "Do you hear it now?"

Yes, Bernard is hearing it now, too. "Yes, yes, the baby is here," cries Jan merrily. He dances on his bed and in his exultation he falls over his little brother. His fine ears have heard a crying, very soft at first, then a little louder: it could only have been the baby!

Mina Voort is holding the crying dwarf in her sure hands. "My God, my God, what a baby you've gotten from Our Good Lord! Look at these eyes, what a boy! What a fine child! It is always the same miracle over again, heh?"

Hendrik stands there bent over mother Crisje who has received the baby from Mina. She is holding him proudly and happily in her arms. She and Hendrik are looking at each other, the tears are running freely, and mutually they can read in each other's eyes:

"We shall be everything to this child and to those whom God has given us, so that He will be able to say to us: You have done well, my children." Nobody has heard the

outside door slam close. It was Trui who has had just one glance at the baby, then grabbed her hood and jacket and ran home where she buried her head in the pillows and cried so that her whole body was shaking.

As mother and child are well taken care of, Hendrik, Crisje and Mina enjoy a cup of coffee together which Long Hendrik has prepared.

"It is funny to say, perhaps, Cris, but this boy is unusual," Mina is reminding them of her prophecy. "You shall see it yourselves. You only have to look at that little face. I have seen many children in my time and I have an eye for this. Here I can feel it for sure. There is life in this child. He's different from the others. Give me another drink, Hendrik, if you don't mind. Well, well, here's the doctor."

With a sidewink towards the midwife the doctor comes in. He and she understand each other. She's done the job already, and she's done it well.

"And Aunt Cris, everything all right? Lucky, what?"

"Yes, doctor, I'm really lucky."

The doctor looks at the child, then he says simply:

"I congratulate you, Wageman." Then he drinks a toast to the health of the little newcomer and is gone.

"Born on a Sunday, Hendrik," says Mina, "and almost a month late. That must be a special boy, heh? We'll have another drink, now, and then I'll go home. I'll come back as soon as I can."

"That's all right, Mina. Now we can help ourselves again."

The two children could not stay in bed any longer. Their curiosity is stronger than their fear of getting a spanking. Carefully they stick their little heads into the

door. Father has seen them already. He walks towards the door.

"Look now, children, what a pretty little brother you have." He pulls the two little ones towards Crisje. But then some neighbors come to visit and the two little brothers have to go back to bed.

"The stork, he hasn't bitten mother in the leg very hard; she can still laugh," Jan is saying to Bernard, but little Bernard is already sound asleep.

How did the peasants hear the news, that they are coming in one by one now to congratulate the happy parents? Long Hendrik doesn't ask them. He is too busy filling the glasses again and again. Crisje is giving him full sway, if only he doesn't go too far. And Hendrik? Well, he cannot restrain himself any more. He has to let the world know how happy he is, and his voice is drowning out all the other noise in the room.

Now it is late already and he is escorting the last visitor to the door. With a sheepish grin he steps back into the room. He looks at the pale, tired face of Crisje and asks uncertainly:

"Are you angry, Cris?"

"You never know when to stop. What a drinking bout that was again."

"But, Cris, shouldn't we treat the boys a little, after we've had such a baby?"

"It's all well and good, but that's too much. Haven't we enough to worry about?"

"Are you still angry, Cris? Just give your Long Hendrik a little smile, will you? Then we'll go to sleep, Cris, and dream about our Jeus. My God, we really should show Our Dear Lord how thankful we are to Him."

"But not in the way you are doing it, Hendrik. No, that doesn't please Our Good Lord. He has enough of that. Really, you're a fine one, to think of it!"

Big Long Hendrik sits down on the edge of the bed. He takes Cris' hand into his own. "Crisje, I'm asking you once more: give your big fellow a smile. You can believe me, I will not do it again. Look, I am holding up two fingers, in the air."

"Don't blaspheme like that, you stupid."

"Can't you laugh yet?"

"You always have to have your will." And Crisje laughs and pulls him towards herself. He kisses her upon her eyes, her cheeks and her mouth.

"Come on, Crisje, lets go and dream, dream about our Jeus."

During the following days Crisje has not much time for herself. Again and again friends and acquaintances call to inquire about the health of mother and child. But it is always more than just one question, for as the women have been informed about everything by Crisje, how she is feeling and how the new born baby is getting along, they begin talking about themselves, and when people are talking about themselves they don't stop so easily. At length they are telling her about all their troubles, and Crisje in her bed hears more hard-luck stories and bad things than good ones.

Her heart is full of sympathy and she can feel with them and understand them so that she has a good and friendly word for everybody. But, how much these people are expecting from her, and how little they're giving in return! Crisje is thinking about this. Now they are going away with the best of resolutions, but it will not take long before

they'll lapse back into their old faults. They don't learn by experience and still they demand attention from Our Good Lord, and a lot of good luck to boot.

The only person who hasn't visited her as yet is her own sister. Crisje knows now what is going on in Trui's mind. It makes her feel bad. Does Trui think that she can soften the heart of the Father of all life by hating herself, the other people and the whole world? Wouldn't humility and devotion help her more?

As Mina comes in, Crisje says:

"Mina, would you mind going over to Trui and call her?"

"Why, hasn't Trui come back?"

"No, Mina, she's feeling pretty low now, believe me. She didn't act like that with Bernard. Just go over and tell her that she can make me very happy."

"If all the people were like you, Crisje, there wouldn't be any badness. I shall go and see what she's got on her mind."

And now Crisje is doing that which she wants Trui to do: she prays:

"You have been so good to me and to Big Long Hendrik whom You have given to me, Father in heaven. And then You gave me Jeus, after I had already two such fine children. If You will answer my prayer, then listen, please, for a moment to me, Your child in bed. Give her a child, Dear God. You know that, if she should not be able to take care of it, I am still here to look after her baby. You know that. Give her a little baby, maybe that'll change her. I hope that I am not asking too much. I don't want to be forward, after all, You know best, My Father."

She has not even finished her prayer as Mina is coming

back, followed by Trui. She thinks in a flash: "God mustn't have been listening to me, for he does not permit of any interruptions."

Trui's face is hard, it doesn't even soften as Crisje is showing her the baby.

"Well, Trui, isn't Jeus a darling little boy? Isn't God good to us? I hope so that He'll give you a baby, too. That's what I'm wishing for," she concludes with a warm voice.

"What's good for you isn't good for me," replies Trui with a biting voice. But now Mina splurts out:

"You have to pray for this, see, Trui? But you always want something for nothing. Crisje has more than you, but she also has her Dear God. Crisje has learned to pray, or do you think, perhaps, that everything comes just like that? That you don't have to do something in return? I know better. Why don't you say something about this little child? There's not one in a thousand like him."

"You act as if he were Our Good Lord Himself."

"No, Trui, that's not so. I shall never say that. I'm saying what I know, what I'm feeling deep within my heart. This isn't just a common child, but he isn't Our Dear Lord Himself, either. But he is going to grow up to be different from all those children around here. You have to change, Trui. The way you look at others, and especially at Cris here who hasn't done anything to you, won't do you any good.

"If God wants it, you'll have a baby, too. But you have to wait and to pray and to be good.

"Don't think that I've anything against you, Trui. You know me. But you must think of Crisje once in a while, she's always thinking of you. But you can't see nor feel it."

Trui is letting her talk. She looks to the ground, but her face remains hard and unmoved. As Crisje is saying her name softly and full of sympathy, she raises her eyes for a moment.

"You don't begrudge me the little fellow, do you? You aren't angry at me, Trui, heh? Take a few of these good eggs along, Trui, I'm happy to give them to you."

"I have chickens of my own. Give them to the poor. I have all that I want. I am not a fool." She leaves without giving the two women another look. Crisje is sad. Something seems to tell her: "You cannot reach her, neither with words nor with deeds. She'll have to fight it out alone, all alone."

Then Long Hendrik enters and he is bringing cheer into the room. He has been telling his boss a thousand times about his new boy until his throat had finally felt like dry cotton. Of course, his boss had to remedy this condition with a few drinks. Mother Crisje is looking at him and she thinks that he is standing there high as a tower next to his boys, and still he is just a child among children himself, in a way. Jan and Bernard are dancing around his legs and he is lifting them up in the air one by one so that at last he's bumping their heads against the ceiling.

"And have you been good boys today, for your mommy?"

A resounding "yes" is the answer.

"What," says daddy, "won't you answer me in two words? You should say 'yes, daddy,' you know that," and he keeps on fooling around with them until their little heads become all red from the excitement.

"Cris, is it true?"

"Yes, Hendrik,—*they* are good, you know that very well." He puts the children down. He has noticed at once how

Crisje emphasised the word "they." His face has become serious, but he does not deceive her,—there is still a merry twinkle around his eyes. And his cheerful voice, too, does not at all fit in with his submissive attitude. He is sitting down on the edge of her bed.

"Are you angry, Cris? But I cannot stand on one ieg, heh? It was the boss' treat. I could not refuse that, could I? But say something, Cris. Look here."

He takes two bottles out of his pockets. Crisje has hardly seen them as she splurts out:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Hendrik. I would not drink a drop of this stolen stuff. It is the devil's! That job is no good for you, Hendrik, you'll have to look around for a different position. Will you do that, Hendrik?"

"I'll think it over, Cris. I cannot do it just like that, I told you that already. I shall do my very best, I promise. I haven't had too much to drink, Crisje, have I?"

"Well, that would be the limit, really. Now go and eat something. That's better for you."

His mouth isn't idle for a moment; when he isn't speaking, he's eating. And he hasn't swallowed the last bite yet as he jumps up to fetch his violin.

"You better go to sleep now, you're as tired as a dog. You talk much too much."

But Hendrik cannot sleep now. His blood is too much in excitement. The "Ave Maria," with which he starts as usual comes off well enough, but as he is trying to play a new piece, his fingers are becoming uncertain. The sounds that are coming out of the violin are causing Vanny, the four weeks old dog of the family to run crying behind the stove.

"Go to sleep, Vanny, and keep your mouth shut."

The long fellow is becoming more angry by the minute as he is fighting with the notes and the strings on his violin, and Vanny saves himself by running into the bedroom where he finds safety between mother Crisje's bed and the cradle.

"Won't he even let you cry?" says Crisje with sympathy to the dog. "That's right, stay with me here and go to sleep." And then to Hendrik:

"Why don't you stop scratching on the fiddle, Hendrik? You cannot play when your head is not clear."

But the long fellow is not yet ready to give up; he keeps on playing. And then little Jeus is raising his voice and he joins mother and Vanny in their protest. This is too much for daddy. He puts the violin down and promptly little Jeus stops to cry and goes back to sleep again.

"We'll go to sleep now, Hendrik. Are the boys well covered? Please go and look."

"Tell me, Crisje, was Trui here today?"

"Yes, she has seen little Jeus and she thinks that he is very cute."

Big Long Hendrik is looking at Crisje with penetrating eyes, but she's looking back at him so that finally he is turning his glances away. He tries to change the subject and says:

"You ought to see Vanny. He is good friends already with Jeus. The two will get along together fine."

Sometime later as he is busy clearing the table he remarks: "So she was here," and Crisje realizes that she cannot hide anything from him.

"And what did the boys say to Jeus?"

Glad that he's talking again about something else, she says quietly:

"I cannot keep Bernard away from the cradle, but Jan hardly looked at him."

"What? Isn't he a peculiar boy, Cris?"

"I don't know yet, but Bernard is very much like you. He's going to give us a lot of trouble yet."

He laughs out loud: "You don't have to worry about him." And in the meantime he has prepared the breakfast table for tomorrow.

The following morning, the first thing that Hendrik does is to get his oldest son out of bed: "I am going to make you pay attention to your little brother, Jan. Do you think that you don't even have to look at him? Now you go to Jeus and tell mother what you think of him."

"Aw, what are you doing now again, Hendrik?" cries Crisje. "Why don't you leave him alone? That comes all by itself."

But the long fellow will not listen. He carries Jan to the crib and holds him near his little brother. "And now give Jeus a kiss." It makes Crisje laugh. Already early in the morning he has to fool around so. She does not say any more; it's of no use, anyway.

"Now, isn't this a nice little brother for you? Wait till he can talk. He has more in his little pinky than you have in your whole body."

"Leave him alone, Hendrik."

Jan starts to cry out loud. "Aw, don't cry now, be quiet. Here's a little coffee for you, from daddy's cup." Hendrik is a little upset; he hasn't expected this result. But Jan is already quiet. To drink out of daddy's cup is quite a privilege.

Crisje gets her coffee with an egg beaten into it. Then Long Hendrik goes to cut the bread.

"Sunday we're going to sing for Jeus, Crisje, for his Consecration. The whole quartet is coming. Then you'll hear what we've learned."

And Hendrik begins to sing. The happiness that is permeating his life is making his voice so strong that the window panes are trembling. Crisje is laughing all over; she's not worried that Jeus may wake up; he is sleeping soundly and awakens only when he is hungry.

"Are you going to be good to mother, now that she's sick? Will you be quiet around the house? If you're good I'll bring you a nice present, both of you. Otherwise you'll get a good spanking. It's all up to yourselves." He's saying this every morning, no matter how late he may be for work. Today, too, Crisje has to rush him. Then suddenly he begins to hurry. He flies into his jacket, lifts the boys once more up, squeezes Crisje almost to death. Then he goes with long steps towards the cradle. But as he is looking at the tender little rosebud that is asleep in there, he makes no more noise and the great big fellow with the long limbs strokes the little cheek carefully so as not to harm the baby and he thinks: "How can such a sweet little thing ever grow up to be a big brute like me!"

Finally he tears himself away. He hides his emotions by making a big noise again. He has to run, for the whistle has already sounded for the Zuten-Emmerik steam car. Long after his departure the room is still filled with his cheer and laughter.

As Mina comes around to call, it is about nine o'clock. She finds Crisje deep in thought. They must be happy thoughts, however, for there is a pleasant expression on her face.

"What makes you so happy, Crisje?"

"I've to laugh about Hendrik. You should have seen the fun we've had this morning. Sometimes he's just like Deut Messing."

"But he's not crazy like Deut. Deut Messing is a fool, but the long fellow knows what he's doing. You surely made a good choice when you took him as a husband. He's been singing again, heh? Well, you surely are worthy of him, Crisje. You two are so different from each other, just like fire and water, and yet, you are so happy together. You hardly will find that anywhere again. How did you two ever come together?"

And then Crisje tells Mina how she got her Big Long Hendrik. It wasn't so easy.

Her parents did not allow her to go out with Long Hendrik. They thought that it was not proper. How could a girl of the middle classes such as she, understand the son of a laborer,—yes, even marry him?

Long Hendrik knew what her parents were thinking about him, and it made him only so much the bolder. But it came so far that they did not see each other any more, although they had not forgotten one another.

It was at a country fair that the long fellow saw her again. She was walking over the fair grounds with her parents. He had hardly discovered her when he left his friends abruptly and ran to her, fast as lightning. Her parents stood aghast and the people all around were laughing, as he grabbed her around the waist and kissed her like wild. He only stopped long enough to call out to her father and mother:

"Now you try and separate us once more if you can. Then I'll come after you." Three months later they were

married. True, she lost her family, but Big Long Hendrik was hers!

"Are you sorry now, Cris?"

"It is on my mind, sometimes, because it is too beautiful, now. Such good things last only a short time, as a rule, and that's what worries me."

"Well, I really cannot understand you, Crisje. Who would worry about such things now! You must enjoy your happiness in full, Cris."

"That's just it, Mina, that's what makes me so worried, makes me think that I won't have Hendrik for long."

"Are you altogether crazy, Cris? What's this now?"

"I can feel it, and nobody can tell me different. Sometimes I am thinking that this is the punishment for having taken him against the wishes of my parents. I can feel it, Mina, and you shall see that this is so."

"Will you now please stop this, Cris? This is also a sin, do you know that? You're not appreciating your good fortune, and for this you'll have to pay."

Mina is now changing the topic of the conversation:

"Has Mrs. de Man been here already, Cris?"

"No, Mina. I feel that she'll be here soon."

"Are they still drinking so much there, Crisje?"

"Every Saturday and Sunday they're as drunk as pigs, Mina. They spend everything at once, and then, for the rest of the week they go begging."

"I cannot understand how you can stand it, Crisje. You can hear every word here that they are saying, can't you?"

"Yes, everything. Sunday night a week ago the burning stove was thrown through the kitchen. Mrs. de Man was screaming so that I had to hold my hands on my heart. And what a cursing, what a language."

"And the boys, are they drinking, too?"

"They are the worst ever. William and Gradus are leading their father on. But for the rest of the week, they make no more noise. Already Mondays Mrs. de Man comes to borrow something. Hendrik does not want it, but I'm helping her anyway. You cannot let that woman die for want, can you? And she's helping me once in a while in the garden. Then she's making up for it in this way, right?"

"But if I would tell you where she's coming from, your hair'd stand on end."

Crisje thinks that it is enough now. She does not like to talk about other people's misery. The conversation stops short as Trui is entering. Crisje is not in the habit of locking her front door so that anybody can come in just like that. "There's nothing to steal, anyway," she likes to say.

"Is there still anything I can do for you, Cris?"

"If you'd want to look after the boys, the pigs and the chickens, Trui, I would be very glad."

Jeus has now opened his eyes. As this does not help, he begins to cry. Mina takes him up and he stops; he has had his will.

Crisje gives him the breast. Again the soft smile is playing about her lips as she is looking at the child, and the same strange feeling is coming over her which she has known since she'd carried him under her heart. What that is, she doesn't know, but it is as if she's dissolving into the being of this child, into that peculiar world which is new to her and in which she's feeling as happy as in heaven. And in the meantime the child is drinking life from her breast. . . .

Mrs. de Man is sitting near Crisje's bed. In spite of her poverty the greasy, cross-eyed little woman has brought

some eggs. The boys are not allowed to come into the room now that the "booze woman" is here. The people say that she's obsessed by the devil and that this comes from the drinking and cursing which she is doing. In this she surpasses any big man. Nobody wants to have anything to do with her, the people in the village are shunning her like the pest, and she knows it very well. Only Aunt Crisje has pity upon her: "Our Dear Lord is forgiving the sinners, so why shouldn't I?" That's what she likes to say. The badness of the "booze woman" makes her go to church where she can pray for the poor thing. And Mrs. de Man knows that, too, but just as if it were of no concern to her, she keeps on drinking.

The little woman who is sitting there, sipping slowly coffee from her cup, she can hardly be such a bad person, a monster that has come from hell!

And Crisje takes this opportunity to talk to her and to teach her a lesson.

"How you have taken a turn again last Sunday, Mrs. de Man; the children could not go to sleep for all that noise. Now tell me, have they done anything to you: Was the old man at it again? And the boys, have they been picking on you again, too?"

But the little woman doesn't say a word. She stirs the coffee in her cup and makes a crooked mouth; then she takes a sip.

Crisje thinks: "What a real devil that woman is. Now she acts as if she couldn't even count up to ten." And she tries it a different way.

"Do you still owe anything at the Kale's?"

Suddenly the old little woman becomes alert. These

words make her sit up and listen. Her cunning little eyes begin to shine.

"Yes," says she, "they drank a trough of beer empty and two liters of whiskey."

"But why do you always join them, then, Mrs. de Man? You don't have to drink when they are drinking. You'll never go to heaven that way." Crisje tries to scare her. "Haven't you ever thought of eternity? Why don't you start now and become good? God is holding out His hand to you. Shall I speak to the priest about you? He is such a good man and understands all the people so well. Shall I see him about you?"

But Mrs. de Man doesn't count herself among the people who want to be understood by the priest. At least that's what she's answering to Crisje:

"Nobody can help me, Aunt Crisje. I and my old man cannot be changed any more."

"If you'll do your best, I'll pray for you to Our Good Lord. He has pity and He's merciful, even though they blaspheme and resist Him every day. Stop that horrible cursing for once. You're calling all the devils from hell upon yourself when you do that."

But now that the conversation is coming to this subject again, Mrs. de Man is falling back into her passive resistance where she doesn't seem to be able to hear a single word.

"Tell me, have you been drinking already this morning? I can smell now that you stink from alcohol."

There is not the least little sign that the woman has heard Crisje's accusation. Even as she answers, her words have nothing to do with it:

"Could you loan me a dollar till tomorrow?"

Crisje is speechless. She stammers: "A dollar . . . ? a dollar? . . ."

"Yes, a dollar, or more, if you can."

But now Crisje becomes really angry. "You don't think, perchance, that I'm rich?"

Happy to have Crisje now on the right subject, her visitor wants to reap her harvest. Unperturbed, she says:

"It's only Tuesday, so you must still have something left."

"You forget that we, too, have our worries. Jeus costs us a lot of money, although we still have the clothing from the other boys. We were not even able to buy a cradle. Hendrik went and made this one himself. I have no dollar! No!"

As she sees that Crisje is serious about it, she says that she'd also be satisfied with a smaller amount. "Maybe you can spare a quarter, then, so that I can help myself."

"What do you want to do with it, Mrs. de Man?"

"Why do you want to know everything, Crisje? If you will not give it to me I shall not know what to do." Then Crisje opens her purse.

A little later Trui asks her:

"Has she left? She wanted money, didn't she? You didn't give that booze hound anything, did you?"

"I'm not crazy, am I?" is Crisje's answer. But her calm is only artificial. Inside of her there is a storm.

"I should not have done that. She's only buying booze with that money, and now I'm even telling a lie about it." These were her thoughts.

Oh, if only Father Reenen, the priest, would come. She could go to confession and would not have to lie in bed with her sin for a whole week.

The children are distracting her for a moment.

"Won't you go and have a look at Jeus, Jan?"

On tip toes the child runs to the wooden cradle. Long and full of devotion he is looking at his little brother.



"Isn't he a darling, Jan?"

The child is nodding his head. "Yes, mother, I think now that he is very cute." Then he looks with his large eyes up to his mother and says: "But—but, mother, did the stork bite you hard? And how often did he bite you?"

Crisje pacifies him: "It wasn't so bad, Jan. I'm getting better fast now."

Carefully the child places the coverlet back and tucks it in.

"If Our Good Lord only would put more into this child of that, of which he gave to Bernard too much," prays

Crisje. Jan is too soft. He's going to have it difficult in life. Jan cannot hold his own against his younger brother. He is good-natured and Bernard is domineering. When he does anything that Bernard does not like, Bernard is right there with his little fists, but Jan would not hit Bernard because he does not want to hurt him. He'd rather give in.

"You are much too sensitive," Crisje is saying to her oldest boy, but he doesn't understand her. For Bernard the visit has already lasted too long: "Come, let's go to the chickens," and he pulls Jan away with him.

Jeus, too, is to grow up to be sensitive, but in a different way altogether. Mina has said that; Crisje is just thinking about that and then her heart is beating with joy: Father Reenen is standing there in the doorway: God has answered her urgent prayer.

"Well, well, Crisje, how are you doing? Can you talk again with me? Or do I have to go away and come back some other day?"

"I thank you, Father Reenen, for coming to see me. You make me really very happy."

"Will you let me see now, Crisje, what a beautiful present Our Good Lord has given to you again?"

"Why sure, Father Reenen," and Crisje wants to sit up in bed, but the priest says quickly:

"Lie down, Crisje, lie down. I know how to act with small children. Just let me go and see him."

He pulls the covers back and looks at Jeus who is lying there sound asleep with his little fists on the pillow.

"My heavens, Crisje, Mina is right; that's a beautiful child you have here. He looks as if he were already a year old. I have a feeling that I'll have some trouble with him some time. You'll see, Crisje, there's something in this

child that's strange to me. Do you think that I'm waking him up with my talking, Crisje?"

"He doesn't wake up so easily, Father Reenen. He sleeps all day long. But when he wants to eat, that's the only time that I hear him."

The village priest sinks into the chair near Crisje's bed. "And how are you yourself, Crisje?"

"Very good, Father Reenen.—May I—eh—now go to confession, Father Reenen?"

"Have you still something to confess, Crisje? Have you really done any wrong in this week? If that's so, then Our Good Lord has already forgiven you."

The good priest is listening to her as if she were confessing to murder and arson. As Crisje has told everything that is on her mind, also her lie to Trui, she leans back with closed eyes and her heart beats in expectation of the verdict of the priest. But as she opens her eyes again, she sees him sitting there, very quiet, with his face in his hands. At last, she asks demurely:

"Is it very bad, Father Reenen, that you have to think so long about my sins?"

The priest is laughing now. He stands up. "Certainly not, Crisje. But it was here so wonderfully quiet all of a sudden and I had gone far away from this place. See, Crisje, I was not really here with you, and yet I have heard everything and I also could think at the same time."

"Well, Father Reenen, where you are there must be silence?"

"That's all well and good, Crisje, but these thoughts were somehow entirely different. To be honest, I have never been able to think like that. My thoughts went so far, then, so very far away."

"You have probably been with Our Dear Lord, since you could have such thoughts and feelings, Father Reenen."

"Probably so, Crisje. I am not going to look into that now; everything that comes to us human beings is, after all, strange and wonderful, don't you think? And as far as our confession goes, I can tell you that you should never have given that woman the money, for this makes it only worse for these people. But I think you could not have known that. The best thing to do in such cases is to seek the advise of Our Dear Lord. Believe you me, Crisje, you will see that He is going to give you the right idea in such situations. But if you cannot feel with the Lord, then you better not give anything to anybody. Otherwise you may be doing wrong.

"All this is not so easy and simple. Many people cannot get the right feelings all their lives, and some find out only when they have become old and grey what they should have done then and there. If I were you, Crisje, I would now forget all about it, for we can suppose that she went and bought whiskey with your money, anyway."

"I did not think that I would get off that easy, Father Reenen, but in the future I shall be more careful. I am so grateful to Our Good Lord."

But Father Reenen is not saying anything, and Crisje is thinking that his thoughts have gone off again, to that place far, far away from here. She turns her head so that she can look into the crib and at the nice round face of little Jeus. The minutes pass by; it is as if they were enclosed by a high wall which is shutting out all noises and sounds from the outside. At last Father Reenen is moving a little. His hand is stroking his forehead as if to clarify

his thoughts. The strange feeling has disappeared and he has returned to reality.

"I have gone through a great silence, I was far from my material body, and I could soar like a bird. The higher my spirit went, the wider and brighter space became all around me. And there was a silence, a calm within me so immense that it could only have come out of heaven."

Oh, he knows how poorly these words are reflecting the greatness of the phenomenon which he has witnessed. But he also knows that it is impossible to express such experiences in earthly words, just as it would be impossible for a human voice to reproduce the song and tunes which his spirit has heard only a few minutes ago, music that must have come from the mouths of angels.

He lifts up his grey head and looks at Crisje. He follows her eyes that are resting upon her little child. And then, slowly, the knowledge is dawning upon him: upon that little baby there his own eyes were resting, too, at the moment when the great wonder came over him.

He does not want to talk any more, although he has still so much to say. Quietly he shakes hands with Crisje and leaves the room, his head bowed. He goes to his church and kneels down in the empty hall in a pew. His head in his hands he re-lives in thought the wonder which he cannot explain to himself but which began with the moment when he was looking into the pure face of the little child. . . .

Jeus is just seven days old as the quartet arrives to give a musical performance for him. By the way, Jeus acts as if all this were of no concern to him. He has his eyes closed and sleeps on in peace.

"You're bringing a lot of cold with you," says mother Crisje. "Warm up a bit before you start."

Stomping their feet and rubbing their hands the men are standing around the stove. Looking at their rough exteriors you would not think that they could have such splendid voices. The first and second basses, Jan Maandag and Gerrit Noesthede, happen to be standing together, and at Long Hendrik's right there are Peter Smadel and his two sons Peter and Ernest, warming their cold bodies at the tiled stove.

The Smadel family are natives of Saxony and have come here to work in the brush factory where they make a good living. The old Peter has a rich baritone and he could have accepted several offers from opera companies; but the love for his wife had kept him back. She preferred a more peaceful and uneventful life, but now he is singing for the people, anyway, albeit only in a quartet that has been founded by Big Long Hendrik. Yet, this quartet should not be underestimated. The golden voices of Peter and Long Hendrik, accompanied by the full, clear singing of the others, have made a great name for it far and wide. They have sung before crowds in Holland as well as in Germany, and with great success.

Sometimes when mother Crisje hears of all these successes she becomes worried: What would Long Hendrik do if he'd get an offer from an opera company; would his ambition carry him away or would the love for his wife and children prevail? Peter has shown himself to be strong, but Hendrik has still to stand up to this temptation, and Crisje knows that such an offer is to be expected.

The voices of these two are matched perfectly. "When they are singing, you cannot keep your tears back, you just feel like crying," Crisje is thinking. "When Peter is singing it seems that heaven is coming down to earth, and

when the long fellow is singing, you feel like rising up to heaven yourself."

With his daddy's permission Jan may stay up this evening. What a pleasure for him! With large, shiny eyes he is following every movement of the men. Nothing escapes him.

"My oldest boy will be a singer, too," says Hendrik proudly, pointing to Jan. "Just listen a moment. Come here."

No, daddy, Jan has no mind for this. He'd rather look and listen quietly. "Come now, Jan, come." Daddy is admonishing.

Tardily, Jan is approaching his daddy. He is bashful.

"Now I want you to let Peter hear what a wonderful voice you already have." But in the eyes of the little fellow there is fear, and daddy is not noticing it. But mother can see how afraid he is and she says:

"Don't be foolish now, Hendrik. The child has no voice. You are only scaring him."

His big hand is resting on the little head. The child feels lost among all these big people. He wishes he were in the arms of his mother, or at least in his little bed.

Hendrik says snappily to Crisje: "If you don't keep still, we're going to charge you admission."

The men are laughing. Gerrit pokes Hendrik in the ribs and says: "Old fool." But Hendrik insists:

"And now be nice, Jan, and sing for us: Silent Night, Holy Night."

The child is shaking. The fear is driving the blood to his head. He cannot bring out a sound.

"Nice now, Jan," says daddy.

The little fellow begins to sing with a thin, trembling

voice: Silent Night. But after the fourth line he breaks off, runs into the arms of his mother and starts to cry most miserably.

"That's what you get for it, you with your nonsense." Mother Crisje is now really angry.

In the meantime the members of the quartet have selected their music. They clear their throats, arrange to stand in the proper order and are now awaiting the sign from Hendrik to start.

Big Long Hendrik throws one more look at Jeus. "Well, let him sleep. I'm telling you, Cris, he'll prick his ears once he hears us sing, for we are not common, every-day singers."

"Now," says Peter. "Ich ben fertig." He speaks two languages mixed up so that it is difficult even for his best friends, at times, to understand him, just as if he were speaking Chinese.

A deep breath all around, and the beautiful notes of: "Im Schoenen Wiesengrunde" sound in the room. It is a full and warm chorus; free and easy sound the notes. They have perfect control of their voices, these men of the quartet.

Crisje thinks that they are singing like nightingales, but at the same time she cannot suppress a laugh as she is comparing this little dainty bird with the big, husky bodies of those men.

Jeus, now convinced that they are really not second rate singers, condescends to open his eyes. He listens attentively, without, however, making the slightest noise in the crib.

Long Hendrik has noticed it already, and, as the first song is finished, he cries with triumph in his voice:

"Now, Cris, what have I told you? Is he listening or isn't he? And he likes our singing, too. What do you say, Peter?"

And stubby little Gerrit Noesthede opines:

"If he wouldn't listen to us, we'd send him back. Then he'd have to listen to the meowing of the angels again."

Peter has come here to sing: "We didn't come here to fool around, we came to perform. Second stanza, please!"

The long fellow gives the sign, and again the voices are resounding in harmony like the pipes of an organ.

Jeus keeps on listening. His eyes don't even wink once, they are fixed upon the singers.

"What's going on in the mind of this little child,—my little child?" thinks Crisje, "as he is lying there, seven days old listening like a grown-up?"

And what experiences are awaiting her with this boy? A great calm is going through her soul again, and, as if a mouth were speaking right next to her ear, she hears a voice clearly, distinctly saying to her:

"There are miracles, nothing short of miracles that will come as he'll grow up."

But whatever these miracles may be, there is no fear in Crisje.

CHAPTER THREE

Miracles about Jeus

AT LAST OLD MAN WINTER IS READY TO GIVE UP; HIS CAPRICIOUS rule is at an end. Gradually the rivers and lakes begin to feel that he is losing his grip on them. And now that Jack Frost has left, the snow, too, is preparing to go; in thousands of little rivulets it is running away.

Then, one happy day the sun is grinning broadly upon the world. All the people are glad to see her and they ask her to come back soon, to stay. And this she promises, and in order to prepare a fitting reception, the trees and bushes decorate their branches with beautiful green. And the herbs and weeds are not far behind: they put on their best hats. In the meantime the musicians have come, too. First they put their little houses, their nests, in order and then they tell the trees and everybody who wants to listen, about their interesting adventures on the long, long trip to the warm countries and back. Then they try their voices, singing a few trills to tune up, and soon their cheerful singing resounds from all the branches and hedges like so many little pipe organs. And now it is summer.

Mother Crisje has opened all the windows; her eyes are resting on the gorgeous red of the geraniums that are blooming on the window sill. She is pressing the soil down around the roots. She has to water them. As she goes to the kitchen to fill her little kettle she looks into the cradle where Jeus is sleeping. He is still lying exactly as she had tucked him in an hour ago.

She is pouring the water on the flower pots and remains standing at the window, but she does not see the children who are playing outside so happily, not even Jan and Bernard who are running a race with the others and who are calling out to her. She is thinking of yesterday. Once more she thinks over everything that happened, but she cannot find an explanation for the strange things which she noticed. And she doubts that she will ever be able to understand. Was it her imagination? Or was it a trick of one of the peasants? Or—but she does not dare to think this out, was it the devil himself who was trying to mock her? She turns around and looks into the cradle, she steps closer, and full of wonderment she looks at the child that is sleeping there so quietly. Then she pulls up a chair and sits down right next to her baby.

Jeus is growing just as normally as the two other children. And yet, there is a great difference, although Hendrik wouldn't admit it. When Jeus is sitting up in his cradle, he is often staring for a long time at a certain point, as if he were seeing something there which is not visible for her or the others. The point at which he is staring seems to move about, at intervals, for Jeus is following it with his eyes so that he has to stretch his little neck and sometimes even falls over to the side or forward. If she wants to stop him, however, he'll let out a yell, crawl back into position and his eyes will search for that point again. Is her child living in a different, a "special" world which is unknown to her, and of which nobody has ever told her?

"All children do that," Hendrik assures her, but mother Crisje knows better.

The relatives, too, don't think that there's anything strange about this strapping youngster with his little pug nose; they are spoiling him in all possible ways. But his

eyes, they admit, are unusual. They are grey-blue, large and deep and really too "knowing" for a child only a few months old. The way he looks at you, they think, is most surprising. He does not look at people as if he did not see them, as other children do, no, his eyes are seeking out your eyes at once and won't let them go, and it is as if he were looking deep down into your soul. Not really, of course, they hasten to add, only speaking figuratively. But Crisje is convinced that her Jeus can see into your soul and knows you as if you had gone to confession with him.

But yesterday something has happened that has caused Crisje really to become frightened. She had taken care of Jeus and laid him into his crib. Jeus had been crying when she covered him up. A quarter hour later she came back to look at him once more, and there was lying next to him in his little bed a rattle, such a rattle as she has never yet seen in the house before. It must have been placed there in that last quarter of an hour. She could have sworn to it that nobody had been in the room in the meantime. But how did that rattle get there? She could not answer this question, and still today it is on her mind, worrying her. When she told Hendrik about it, he laughed. "Someone must have done it secretly, Cris, maybe Trui,—of course she would not admit it."

It may be a joke to the long fellow, but she wants an explanation. Was she imagining things,—was it a joke of the peasants, or maybe Trui,—or—was the devil vexing her? He would do such things, thought Crisje,—well, if the devil was after her, it wouldn't be a life for her any more. Oh, stop! If the devil wants to pester her, then let him do his stuff,—he is always after the faithful ones, but let him come, she would be strong, and pray. But she's not satisfied

with this explanation. Jeus who was so deep and pure and quiet, he should be under a spell? no, no, no!

Jeus, by the way, has already taken his choice. He throws the old rattles which are still from Jan and Bernard, out of his crib and keeps the one which is now disturbing mother Crisje in everything she's doing and waking her up when she's asleep.

Then nothing happens for many months, only that Jeus is thriving and growing and still staring intently towards certain spots where Crisje cannot see anything in particular, and that he goes peacefully to sleep when he has stared enough.

Crisje wants to forget the incident that has scared her so much, but suddenly she is reminded of it again with a shock.

It is noontime and Jan and Bernard are playing outside. Crisje is sewing. She has moved her chair closer to the window so that she can look out over the gravel path. The sun is shining in broad beams through the wide-open window. The people in the street look happy, in the trees along the road the birds are singing. The world is friendly, thinks mother Crisje, and beautiful, and she looks up from her knitting needles. This is such a beautiful, secluded spot, and God is looking down upon her, watchful and loving, and Crisje says: "I thank you, my God, that you are making me so happy," and she is saying it two, three times over. A little later she goes to the bedroom to fetch something, and as she passes the crib she looks at Jeus who is lying there breathing peacefully. A fly is bothering him and she is chasing it away. And then, as she comes back again to the crib from the other room she sees that there is a wreath of corn-flowers lying on Jeus' little head. In terror she grabs

the wreath and throws it out of the window. Now she is sure: the "hex" is on her little boy. It is always like this: the "hexen" first bring gifts to their victims, as for instance this little wreath! And she knows, the unfortunate child that receives such a wreath will become insane sooner or later.

This is more than Crisje can stand. "God, my God!" she stammers. Gone are the rest and peace of mind that she felt only a few minutes ago. Out of the corners of the room little devils are jumping at her and knock her happy world to pieces where she thought to be so happy and secure. Everywhere she is seeing grinning faces and hands that are reaching out for her child. She picks up her Jeus and runs out of the house, to the place where Trui lives.

Trembling and as if hunted she tells her story, pressing her baby against her breast as if to protect him against those invisible dangers. Trui waits till she has finished. Then she speaks to her in a sharp, unsympathetic voice in which there is nothing of understanding nor pity:

"Well, you shouldn't have had anything to do with that booze-woman; of course, she put the 'hex' on your child." That's the only consolation she has for mother Crisje.

"But I haven't seen her for months," comes the weak reply.

"That has nothing to do with it. The devil will wait for his victim for years. He doesn't care about time, as we do." Why only that sharp, biting tongue that is hurting Crisje so much! It is the hatred that is now at last coming out, the hatred for her who has happiness and love but who is now defenseless in her great fear. But don't you see, Trui, that you are turning Crisje away, Crisje who herself is always ready for everyone? Don't you see that she is helpless,

Crisje who is otherwise so brave and strong, but who is now thinking that her child is in danger? You who'd want to be a mother yourself, you have no sympathy for her who is laying her head into your hands like a scared, helpless child? No, you couldn't help her anyway, even if you wanted to!

Your heart is cold, Trui. Your terrible grief that you couldn't have a child has turned into hate during those long, lonesome years so that the little feeling that was in you has been smothered.

"I have been telling you right along. But you didn't want to listen. And now they got you."

The clear, hard tone of Trui's voice makes Crisje shudder. She turns and runs for the door. Trui looks after her, her hands on her hips. She had been waiting for this moment for a long time!

But strangely, as she sees Crisje running through the front garden with her head bent down, the triumph dies away. Her hands fall down alongside her body. This victory, she feels now, tastes too bitter. She feels empty and poor.

Crisje is outside again in the bright sunshine. For a moment she is uncertain where to go, but only for a moment, then she knows. Without knowing it, Trui has taught her a lesson. "Don't depend on others when you meet with the problems of life, not even when you think that you cannot overcome them alone. Fight back, Crisje, all by yourself, fight back with all your might."

That's what she has learned from Trui, and thus she goes back to her own home.

While the children are playing with the pretty little wreath which they have found in the street, mother Crisje

is praying on her knees. Her head is resting against the edge of the crib where she has placed her Jeus again. And as she is praying so fervently, she suddenly feels his little hands digging into her hair. Then they lie quiet, and strangely, out of these little hands there streams now a power, a strength that makes all her sorrow and worries disappear. And in the peacefulness that has come over her she is not asking herself any more why God should find it necessary to bring her all these strange and fearsome visitations from the time on that she has been carrying her little Jeus under her heart. In her faith and prayer she has powerful weapons and she realizes that she should rely more on these.

The long fellow laughs again as she is telling him about the new incident. The sober expression in his eyes shows her at once that he does not believe in the least in this strange thing.

"You shouldn't drive yourself so hard, Crisje, you only make it hard for yourself, and that's wrong, heh? How could that now have happened?"

"That I don't know, Hendrik, but it surely did happen."

Is there any time that Crisje is not busy with little Jeus? To bathe the little body, to dress and to feed him are the high points in her day which passes by, filled with work and care for her family, and more often than not for others, too. And in the meantime he is always on her mind, it is really as if there were no distance between her and his crib, as if he were still dwelling within her.

Crisje is sitting near the cradle and rocking it softly. Jeus' eyes are already heavy and it shall not be long now that he'll be fast asleep. Crisje is speaking to the child, soft,

intimate words such as can only come when a mother is alone with her baby. A little smile plays around his mouth, the last farewell before he goes on that big trip into the far-away, white land of slumber.

Cris stops her rocking. Reluctantly she tears herself from the little crib. Soon Long Hendrik and the boys will be home and they'll come with empty stomachs. Crisje places the little basket with potatoes to her left, fills a pan with water and then she begins to peel them. For quite some time nothing can be heard than the potatoes plopping into the water.

While her hands are working deftly on the potatoes Crisje suddenly becomes aware of the great silence that is around her. It is as if she and the house had been placed under a great bell which cuts off all the noises from the outside. Continuously her eyes are shifting towards the cradle. And then something happens that reminds her at once of the rattle and the little wreath. Her heart starts to beat fast, she drops the potato on the floor but doesn't even notice it. Her eyes are staring at the cradle which is rocking, swinging by itself as if by an unseen hand!

At first she thinks that it is her imagination, but she cannot take her eyes from the cradle: it has stopped rocking. She wants to laugh but before she can purse her lips the cradle starts swinging again, stronger now than before!

Now she tries to encourage herself. No, this time she will not run away. With a little prayer on her lips she runs towards the crib, but there is nothing that could cause this rocking. Then she goes to the bedroom and takes the bed-spread from her bed. It is a heavy cloth and she covers the crib with it. But she has not gone more than a step or two when the little wooden bed starts to rock again, so vio-

lently this time that she fears that little Jeus might fall out. Trembling from head to foot she wants to take little Jeus out of his bed, but as she sees how peacefully he is sleeping she leaves him there. It gave her a shock, but she isn't frightened any more now. "Be strong and pray," she's telling herself again and again. Thus she returns to her chair and peels potatoes. Her hands are still trembling a bit, it is true, but also this abates as she hears Jeus crying after a little while. In two steps she is at the cradle, but the child is smiling at her as she is bending over him. He's kicking his feet with pleasure.

"No, they shall not hex you, what, Jeus?"

Later then, as she is busy again, she is thinking what Hendrik may have to say to this. "You mustn't work so hard," she can hear him already. But it is easy for him to talk. In his realistic life and work the strange, wondrous incidents of which Crisje is telling him seem improbable, yes, even impossible. But it is also because his "one-ness" with Jeus is not as complete as is hers. He hasn't felt the child grow and move within himself, he doesn't know anything of the long talks she has with him while she's sitting at his cradle, discourses that had their beginnings when he was still securely in her body. He doesn't know the sacred calm into which the little fellow is leading her by her hand.

No, Hendrik may laugh and make fun of her, but she knows better. She who has learned in her life to remain with both feet on the ground will not laugh about the miracles because she has seen them with her own eyes, and, even though she cannot find an explanation, she nevertheless cannot doubt them.

If Jeus could speak he'd be able to explain to her these

strange things as for instance the rocking of the cradle. For months, already, he has been seeing more than his father and mother. Sometimes his eyes seem to reflect a brilliant light. As he is looking into this glare, he seems to become older fast, and he can see sharply and speak and think like a child of seven. While his body is not changing, his soul seems to gain in depth and power of comprehension. And in the beginning he sees only moving shadows in the light, but soon the contours become more distinct, he can make out a large man who looks like his father and has also a little pointed beard. He is wrapped in a long flowing gown which radiates light. At his feet children are playing, and they, too, are wearing shining little robes. The long man is smiling at Jeus, and the children wave at him. Jeus doesn't dare to move too much, he's just looking with wide open eyes. And Jeus notices that mother doesn't see what is going on in the room. She is busy with her work and only once in a while she throws a glance towards his cradle, where his little body is sleeping soundly.

Today, mother had rocked him to sleep at noon time. As he falls more and more into slumber, his spirit remains strangely in consciousness. And as the light 'round about him becomes more intense, his powers of thinking also are enhanced. Again he is in the world where the long man and the children are living, a world which is quite different from the one where father and mother live. Jeus is sleeping, and yet it is possible for him to walk through the room and to observe. From the light that is now above him a great calm and happiness is coming down upon him. Now he is looking at mother who is busy peeling potatoes. Shall he go and scare her once? From where does this thought come to him? He doesn't know, but it comes

again, stronger this time. Jeus runs to his cradle. With a smile he looks at his own little body in there and then he places both his little hands upon the edge of the cradle. He feels a strength that is not his own come into him, into his hands, and now the cradle begins to rock. Jeus is looking at his mother and follows her thoughts. Mother Crisje gives a great start, but at the same time she tries to remember that she should not forget herself. Jeus feels that he has to rock the cradle once more, and for the second time the crib moves. Mother has jumped up, she's afraid, now, but doesn't want to admit it. She goes to the cradle and looks into it, and underneath, to find out what made it move, but, of course she cannot find anything. Then Jeus sees her go to the bedroom to get the bedspread which she places over the cradle. Again, but stronger, Jeus is pushing the little crib. With a trembling body, mother holds the cradle and wants to take the child out, but as she sees his little head she changes her mind and goes back to her chair.

A great many things have happened to mother, and to Jeus, too. He turns his eyes up and in the great light he sees the figure of the long man. This must be an angel, thinks Jeus. It is not clear to him what the meaning of all this might be. Only later, much later shall he find out. This knowledge, too, seems to come to him from the great light. Then a feeling of tiredness, of sleepiness overcomes him and as he awakens, he is a baby again, disconnected from all the wonderful feelings and powers which have been carrying him only a short time before.

CHAPTER FOUR

True stories

SEVERAL TIMES CRISJE HAS BEEN LOOKING AT THE CLOCK already. The dinner is getting cold and stale and Hendrik is late. Jan and Bernard are assuring her that they are "dying" of hunger. She pushes the window curtains aside and tries to look outside. She cannot see much because it is already pretty dark and one of those endless, drizzling rains is falling. Crisje is influenced by this weather and feels sad and subdued. The only thing that would cheer her up now would be the return of Hendrik.

Jan is asking if he may go out to meet his father, but just as Crisje wants to deny him this, she hears on the gravel path the long steps that are Hendrik's. Two minutes later his strong hands are grabbing her around the midriff. With a laugh, the long fellow is lifting her up so that her hair is sweeping the ceiling of the room.

"Let me go, you," cries she, but you can see that she is very pleased. Her "long fellow" is back home again. He sits down on a chair and pulls her upon his knee.

"Have you something to confess?"

"Sure," says Hendrik, "and it's something good, you'll be glad about it."

"Well, what is it?"

Hendrik teases her curiosity which she cannot hide: "First give me a great present, otherwise I'll not say anything." He doesn't have to wait long for this.

"Now, how much longer do I have to wait?"

"Just a little bit, dearest. I have to think a minute." And Hendrik thinks. He is not laughing any more, he's serious. A strange unrest is coming over Crisje.

"I want you to listen carefully now, Crisje. You know how, about a month ago, we went to Wesel to sing. In the audience there were some stage people who listened to our singing. At first I could not believe it, so I waited. But today, at noon, they came to see me."

"And—well what—?" Crisje knew for a long time that this moment was coming. Now that it is here, the apprehension overcomes her and magnifies her fears a thousand-fold.

"Be quiet now, you'll have to wait a short while. They asked me if I wanted to study in order to be able to sing in the opera."

The terrible question which she has feared more than any living being, this question stands now here in her room, big and threatening, between herself and Hendrik. What was his answer? She tries to read it in his face. She pulls all her courage together and, without even a tremble in her voice, she asks:

"And what did you say, Hendrik?"

"Well now, don't you know that? You always know everything in advance!"

"You didn't do it, Hendrik?"

He takes her into his arms and kisses her, and, with his mouth against her ear, he whispers:

"No, I called it all off! I want to stay with you, Cris, with you and with the boys."

Crisje is gasping for air. Cold and hot shivers are run-

ning over her alternately. For a moment she is speechless and looks at her Long Hendrik. Then her happiness, her excitement are breaking out:

"My God, my God, how happy you're making me. For this I shall thank Our Good Lord. You have earned a reward; I'll get it for you myself." She embraces her Hendrik again and again and cannot let go of him. Then she grabs the bottle and runs out of the house. Her feet are dancing on the pavement; it is her happiness that is making her fleet and is giving her wings. Her ambitious Hendrik has done what Peter the quiet and simple fellow did: pass up a life of glory and adventure for the quiet, orderly existence which they are enjoying now. She feels happy and her heart is as glad as that of a young girl who is coming out of the arms of her lover, her mouth still warm with his kisses.

She is bringing home three measures, for, as she is standing before the counter she suddenly remembers that tonight Gerrit Noesthede and Jan Maandag will be coming to visit.

Quick as the wind she is setting the table and her mouth does not rest for a minute:

"Go and eat quickly, Hendrik; they'll be here in no time; I'm so glad. You can count on me. Never, Hendrik,—and I know what I'm saying,—never shall I complain about anything, no matter what comes. From now on I'll let you do just as you please. It's a great sacrifice that you're bringing now for me and the children, the greatest that could be expected from you. You and I,—we might be better off in some ways, but who could say that we could ever be more happy together? And I can see Father Reenen, how happy he'll be that he'll have you now for his

church. It's truly a blessing, Hendrik. I am really proud of you, do you know that?"

Hendrik is deeply touched, but first he has to swallow a big potato before he's able to express his innermost thoughts:

"If I didn't have you, Cris, I'd be as poor as a mouse. You are everything and all to me, and now let's have a little drink, heh?"

The cheerfulness of the parents reflects itself in the children. With shining eyes they're listening to the strange things that daddy and mommy are saying to each other. They nudge each other under the table. Bernard throws his arms around mother and kisses her on both cheeks. Jan is looking on; he laughs only. And then high on horseback, riding on their daddy's shoulder, both children are being carried to their bed where they soon enter the land of dreams. And there the children see such interesting things that they do not even hear the loud voice of Gerrit Noesthede who is dropping in a little later with much yelling and ado. As he sees the little glasses which Hendrik has filled—"in order to celebrate"—he rubs his hands in pleasant anticipation.

"I'm just in time, what? You can see, Cris, a man like me has a fine nose. Good evening."

His glass is ready for him. Soon it is empty; he downs the fiery liquid in two, three draughts, then he rolls his eyes with a sigh: "That sure's good."

"Have you heard it already, Gerrit?" Of course, Crisje has to come out with the news, and in the same breath she says: "Hendrik is not going. You know what I mean?"

And Gerrit knows indeed. "Is it true, Hendrik? Dammit, I didn't think you would. Does Peter know? When Jan

comes, he can tell him quickly. Why, Peter will be glad. He had been worried already. It's fine, so, and much better, too. People like us were not born for the city, in fact I wouldn't even want to live in the city, would you?"

Jan Maandag, the quiet, peaceful man, is coming a little later and he just looks surprised at the news. He hasn't as many words as Gerrit.

The three men are sitting around the table. An agreeable feeling of laziness is coming over them, they're stretching their legs, they dig into their pockets for their clay pipes and Hendrik's tobacco pot is handed around. In blue, aromatic clouds the smoke is rising towards the ceiling and for a short time there is silence. They all are enjoying the rest after a hard day's work. That's all they expect: to sit here quietly together, with a drink in the glass, to bite on their pipe stems and to blow the smoke up into the air; then to talk about the unimportant things of life.

Crisje is busy clearing things away, she has put some milk on the fire and now she is pouring hot water on the coffee. Every once in a while she looks over to the three men, and she has a happy smile around her mouth and in her eyes. Gerrit is a widower and Jan a bachelor. They follow her with their eyes and enjoy the gracefulness of her walk. They both are now probably thinking of the same thing: Their own homes to which they shall return tonight alone, only to eat and to sleep. Vanny the dog is sniffing Gerrit's trouser legs. He's scenting his enemy. Vanny isn't a fighting dog but he cannot get along with Gerrit's dog Nico. Tonight, however, he's especially peace loving, perhaps because he's eaten his tummy full, so he overlooks Nico's scent and lays his head on Gerrit's knee, closing his eyes to sleep.

The coffee seems to have aroused Gerrit somewhat: the silence has been long enough for him again.

"Well, Cris, how is Jeus? Is he good? Does he still take the breast? What have I heard, you're smearing mustard on?"

"That's none of your business," laughs Crisje. "What do you know about such things?"

But Gerrit persists:

"So that's what you think, heh? Have you forgotten that I have brought up three kids of my own? My wife used to say always: Gerritje, Gerritje, what you don't know about children! But here's something else: if you're nice, I'll carve a beautiful statue of Our Dear Lord for you, or shall I make it a St. Francis of Fassisi?"

"You mean Assisi, stupid," Crisje corrects him.

"Well, Cris, you're shaking your head at me now, but the Saint won't be angry at me for that."

"You'll have to know that yourself. I don't have to confess for that." Crisje is laughing.

"Confess? I do what Casje is always saying; when your sins become too big to confess then you get a bottle of whiskey and bring it to the priest."

"Devilish heathen, you," cries Crisje who is now really angry. "What a language, this is worse than cursing. This is giving offence!"

"Talking about Casje," Jan Maandag is butting in here with his calm voice, "has any one of you seen him lately?"

"Sure," says Long Hendrik, taking a sip from his glass. Then, licking his lips: "It's some time ago, now; I had been working with him together, with the pictures, you know,—but Crisje didn't like it, it kept me away from home too much. But Casje has stopped, too. He is going

around again with his little boxes; he doesn't come out this way any more. He is traveling mostly in Limburg, Brabant and Flanders where he's making his living. He just likes to change."

"And a good drink, too, just like us," says Gerrit and shoves his glass towards Hendrik. The long fellow takes the hint and fills the glasses all around. Gerrit cannot keep quiet for long. He continues:

"Now tell us honestly, Hendrik, do you really want us to believe that you refused that offer just because you wouldn't leave Crisje and the boys? I personally think—although I don't want to say it right out, that those stage people changed their minds after they listened a little closer to your singing! They didn't want you because of your voice, heh? There's too much of a croak in it! But *my* voice,—you should listen to that!" Gerrit is standing up and waves his hat which he is never taking off, not even in the house, and he begins to sing—in . . . Italian. Long ago he had been sent to Florence by an art dealer to repair a painting. Is it true? Nobody wants to believe him that the damaged Italian painting could only have been repaired by Gerrit Noesthede and nobody else. However, he is boasting always with the Italian which he has learned on that trip, an Italian which, alas, is of the strange kind that can be understood by every Dutch peasant!

"Look," says Gerrit as he sits down again on his chair, "the voice that I have, of course, you haven't got *that*, Hendrik, otherwise those stage people would have accepted you."

Now that Gerrit has started, it is hard to make him stop. But the others don't want to stop him, anyway, they like to listen to him.

"Last night, Cris, I had such a beautiful dream. And you may not believe it, but that dream will come true literally! I was with St. Peter! Up there in heaven, St. Peter is also the doctor, you know. Well, I went right to him. And what do you think he said to me? 'Gerrit,' says he, 'my good man Gerrit,'—listen to this—he says: 'crack as many jokes as you want, Gerrit, it won't do any harm to your health, but see to it that you get a drink, for otherwise you cannot talk, see?' Yep, that's what he said. Well spoken, but now you have to see to it that my dream comes true. Long Hendrik, pour us another, or else I cannot talk."

Big Long Hendrik is already busy filling the glasses, and, although he himself doesn't do much talking, he isn't forgetting himself here.

"Cris, and St. Peter said also that the people are bad, that they are not going enough to church and that they are gossiping much too much about one another."

"You are now acting just as Manus Reuzel: drinking and complaining about the faults of the people, that's his line."

"Manus Reuzel, that's true, too. How I laughed last week, Hendrik; but now it came all true."

"Tell us, go on, Gerrit," says the long fellow, and they all move closer with their chairs. They know Gerrit; now he has a true story.

"Well, you know how Anny is, heh?" Anny is Gerrit's sister, an angular, unmarried woman, and she lives together with him. "Last week, now, she had a toothache, but she wouldn't go to the dentist. So I said to her: 'Go to Manus, he can take your toothache away just like that.'—'What does he do, then?' asked she.—'What he does? well, he

rubbs the tooth so with his thumb,' and I showed her how.—'Bah,' says she and looks disgusted,—'he would do it with his ugly black claws?'—'Now, what of it? Would you rather run around with your toothache? It's up to you. But Manus can help you.'—For a whole week she went around with her toothache. And it became worse all the time, so that she went all night with a cloth around her head. Every night I had to listen to the moaning, I couldn't stand it any more. So I gave her a little brandy; at least I told her it was brandy, but it was really some of that old hundred-proof with some holderberry sap, for I thought by myself: 'If you have a good nightcap on, I can sleep at least.' And she certainly slept like an ox. But the next evening she asked for another brandy. Well, I thought that won't do any good; I like that old hundred-proof myself, and besides I am only making a drunkard out of her, and, says I to myself, Gerrit, says I, one drunkard is more than enough in one house. So I started talking again about Manus. And, Cris, listen, now it comes."

"It takes you much too long already, Gerrit," says Crisje impatiently.

"Now listen to that, Jan. Put your hat on, good and tight for we have to run out in a hurry, because of Cris. Now, shall we knock a hole into the door?"

"Aw, go on with yer story. Nothing will come of it, anyway, as usual."

"Oh, nothing, eh? That's what you think. But listen. Anny went to Manus. Late in the afternoon she came back to me as white as a sheet, from the treatment Manus had given her. She had gone there first in the morning, but Manus was just busy shoeing two horses and asked her if she'd come back around noontime. 'Do I have to let that

beer barrel rub my tooth?' cried she around noon. 'Beer barrel or no beer barrel,' said I, 'he can take your pain away. If I were you, I would go right back to him. You mustn't forget that you may lose all your teeth that way.' Then she went back to the smith. He said to Anny: 'Sit down there,'—and he pointed at a . . . beer barrel! Then Manus kneeled down beside her, with his head down, to pray for strength. Anny had to close her eyes to pray with him:—'And I was sitting there, praying faithfully,' recalled Anny, white with anger, 'and suddenly the smeary fellow grabbed me by my seat and pinched me. Well, I gave him such a slap as I have never given to anyone. You try and send me somewhere again, you . . . My heavens, what a smearpot.'

"But the funny part of it is, Hendrik, that she's got no more toothache. Now you go and say again that Manus cannot cure you. Anny has been to church already six times after that, to confess and . . . to ask for strength."

Still shaking with laughter, Long Hendrik says:

"Empty your glass, Gerrit, your tongue must be all dry right now."

"See, Cris, Hendrik knows what a good story teller has to have. And that's true, too . . ." He bursts into a laugh, takes a quick swallow and starts in again: "I shall never forget it; once my late father—God bless his soul,—had to speak at a meeting before more than a hundred people. It was an important occasion, I remember very well. Those lecturers have always a glass with water next to them on the desk, for all that talking makes their vocal cords somehow shrink, and to loosen them up they take a sip of water now and then. Now then, my father had been talking already for a while and when he had his listeners spellbound

for a moment, he took a sip. But there were some practical jokesters who had filled his glass with that old hundred-proof. That was something which my father had never tasted before. It must've tasted good to him though, because he took up that glass quite often after that. Then suddenly he starts to laugh, jumps away from his desk and careens over the podium, saying the most stupid things. The audience didn't know what to make of it, they didn't know about the old hundred-proof. And when my father saw that nobody was laughing, he became angry and yelled: 'Don't sit there like a bunch of lummoxes,—go home and to bed, what do you want here, anyway?' "

Later, as Hendrik and Crisje are cleaning up the room, Crisje says:

"Isn't he a fool, this Gerrit?"

"Well, he can tell stories, I think he can fool the whole world. Come, let's go to sleep, now. Tomorrow is another day."

CHAPTER FIVE

Crisje is dreaming and sees the "Outer Courts"

MOTHER CRISJE IS FOLLOWING WITH HER EYES THE MOVEMENTS of the child. This little human being that is crawling on the floor here, has been shaped within her own body, has taken the milk from her breast and the love from her heart. Only a few short months ago it was, that she saw him for the first time. Solemnly, she had taken the frail, trembling little body into her arms and she had been immeasurably happy as she had been looking into the red little face and at the little hands, so that she had even forgotten her pains for the moment.

In the quiet hours when the child had been lying asleep after nursing, she had been thinking about this mystery, how such a little life could come into being in her body, how the eyes could form in the right places, ready to receive the light, how the little limbs could grow properly and, last but not least, how, oh wonder, the little heart could grow and start beating! And with tears in her eyes the mother thinks how great the love must be of the Divine Sculptor Who creates His children wonderfully and fearfully and calls them sparks from His own fire.

The child learns to see, to use his legs and arms, he grows in body and spirit. Soon he begins to speak, to think and to act on his own; he becomes a human being with a

free will of his own and cognizant of good and evil. And the mother who is walking after her child, little Jeus, who is crawling on the floor and crowing lustily, she is asking herself all kinds of questions. Shall he find his way through life, life that is so difficult and involved, so full of pains and disappointments, so—hard? Is he going to spread love on earth or is he going to curse humanity? His little hands,—are they going to do an honest day's work or shall they serve iniquity? These are oppressing questions, but what mother would not have such thoughts in her mind?

Crisje is looking at her little boy. "Unusual" they had called him already at his birth, and it is true, she knows it. And she is thinking of the strange things that have happened in connection with this child. She is looking into his eyes and she can feel the depth of the little soul.

The child is sitting still now and stares. He is looking upwards, holding his little head askance as if he were listening to strange voices, sounds that do not reach her ears, however.

Crisje is asking herself what life may have in store for him and also, what he himself will have to offer to life. But about this she feels sure, a certainty which she cannot understand.

Jeus has looked enough. He is down again on his hands and feet and crawls towards his mother. As he comes to her chair, he sits up again and stares up to her with a serious expression. She smiles at him and her hand is stroking his little head. He is still staring, and then suddenly he says very calmly: "Crisje—long man."

Crisje is scared for a second, but then joy overwhelms her: the little fellow has spoken,—and how! It sounded

more beautiful than the sweetest music. She picks him up, kisses him heartily and says:

"Don't let your daddy hear that you call him 'long man'; he may not like it. My God, how you're making me happy, it's a good sign that you called your daddy with your first words!"

Now everybody who comes into the house has to hear the news. As Trui comes, Crisje tells her, too, but Trui has to detract from Crisje's happiness even now: "Aw, Crisje, that doesn't mean anything. You only make a lot of noise about nothing." But Crisje explains to her:

"You don't understand this, because you haven't any children of your own. You don't know how touching it is for a mother when the child is calling his parents for the first time. That is for us as if Our Dear Lord had said it Himself. Yes, you may laugh at me, but you can be sure that, when little children call your name, that means that they are loving you very much. And that's something. That's worth more than all the money in the world. It comes straight away from heaven."

Trui is not convinced. She has to bring her poison into this happiness:

"Yes, yes, I've heard all that before, but it doesn't always come out that way. You remember, at Dora Klink's they had a maid who went off to get married. You know the story, mother has told it to us many times. Well, she was married and had a child, and then she went around full of joy and told everybody: 'Listen to this, my baby has said his first word this morning. He has called me by name.' And what was the end of it? Later their own child cut his father's throat, see?"

Trui couldn't have said anything worse. Her words are

cutting into Crisje's heart. But she doesn't answer. She picks up her Jeus and presses her face against his little body. "No, Jeus, you won't do that to me, eh?" And as if to demonstrate that all of Trui's talking still cannot turn her against her children, she picks them up one by one and kisses them passionately. That's something Aunt Trui does not like to see, so she leaves the room in a hurry. Later Crisje hears the gossip in the village that she has hurt Trui without intending it: she has "stabbed her sister's eyes out" by showing her so ostentatiously how happy she is with her children!

Crisje has followed Trui with her children till she came to her house: "Have you nothing at all to do, Cris?" cries Trui.

"I would like it very much, Trui, if you, too, would kiss my children." Did she really think that she could pacify her sister in this way? If she did, her hopes are quickly made to naught by Trui:

"Don't act so unhappy, Cris. You cannot even figure out what a person wants to do and what not. I have absolutely no mind of kissing your children. Now I have to go to the backyard." With this, Trui leaves Cris standing alone.

There she is now with her three children. Jan and Bernard are looking at her and don't know what to make of it all. She pushes them out through the door. Inside she's boiling. "As far as I care, you can go right to the dickens," she is saying it three times over, but only in her thoughts. But then she is frightened by her wickedness and she remembers that, after Hendrik's decision not to go to sing at the opera, she had made a vow not to use rude or blasphemous language any more, to show her gratitude to Our Good Lord. And "to go to the dickens" is a curse,

isn't it? It really meant to "the devil," hm. And she has wished that on Trui, her own sister!

"Good gracious, how a person can commit sins without really meaning it," thinks Crisje as she is going home discouraged. Jan and Bernard may stay outside and play. She is carrying Jeus into the house and puts him down on the floor.

The little child looks around as if to look for something. Then he lies down on his back and falls asleep. Crisje thinks that the floor is too hard for him, so she gets a pillow from the bed and places Jeus on it. Immediately Jeus opens his eyes.

"Are you sleepy, Jeus? Shall I put you in your cradle? Come, now, there you can sleep nicely." But she's hardly picked him up when Jeus begins to cry, louder than he has ever cried before.

That's something new for Crisje. So, he could be bad, just like other children! Well, she puts him back on the floor, and in less than a few seconds he is soundly asleep again. Crisje gives a start: "Haven't I seen this before?" she's thinking. "But where? I know this way of sleeping. Good heavens, where have I seen that before?" And then it suddenly comes back to her: "Yes, that's right, that was when his cradle was rocking. Now I remember. He fell asleep then within the second, just like now."

Crisje looks into the relaxed little face. The little mouth is half open, the chest is heaving up and down regularly. She kneels down and bends over him, she looks and cannot turn her eyes away from him. She looks around now to make sure that nobody can see her, then she lies down on the floor next to her child. She calls herself crazy for doing this, but she remains lying on the floor. As she is placing

her hand upon his little body, she can feel a great warmth going from him to her, a feeling of blissfulness. But Jeus is not so much affected by the touch of her hand. He opens his eyes promptly and Crisje thinks that she should let him lie alone; children don't like it very much when grownups are looking on. And that Jeus is playing, about this Crisje has no doubt, although she cannot imagine what the game could be.

She gets up and sits in her chair which during the cold months is standing near the stove. Jeus is asleep again. For a long time she is looking at him.

And suddenly the boy gets up, he walks through the room, the walls divide before him and he is outside. Mother Crisje cannot remain in her chair; she gets up and follows her child into space. She is moving as if on silky clouds. The earth is disappearing, enveloped in a fog, and, the higher they are rising, the greater becomes the silence around her and within her. She knows this calm, this great silence; she had experienced it while she was expecting her Jeus, her boy who is now walking before her as if he knew his way in these worlds.

Oh this silence! It reminds her of the sublime moment at church just before the priest is taking the Holy Host out of the Sanctum. A comparison, for a moment it seems to her a blasphemy and she is scared to death, but she did not drop dead on the spot, she's still alive, and in the excitement she even forgets to cross herself three times. And in the meantime she is rising higher and receiving this sacred calm within her. But then her thoughts are interrupted; she is hearing a noise; it is as if her little garden gate were opened and closed. She can hear steps on the gravel path, the front door creaks and then somebody

knocks. Crisje is turning around and, quick as an arrow she is returning to earth. It is the beggar who is used to calling at this hour for alms. As he comes shuffling into the room, Crisje is sitting quietly in her chair and says "Howdy" to him as if she had been waiting just for him all this time.

Yet, she is still living in the great silence of "up there," that great happiness is still singing within her soul and lovingly she decides to let this unfortunate fellow take part in her riches. She takes her purse which looks rather lean than fat, and takes out a guilder. The beggar cannot believe his eyes; hastily he puts the money into his pocket, as if he were afraid that Crisje might change her mind. He thanks her, bows ten, twenty times to her and then he runs outside to look at his treasure a little closer and to marvel at such liberality.

Mother Crisje is leaning back again in her chair. She is holding her head with her hands and starts to dream. And in all her life she has never had such beautiful dreams:

Crisje is walking on a broad path which is ending somewhere in a golden distance. She is entering a world in which she can hear the heartbeat of God. There is no sun, yet this space is flooded in light, a light which actually seems to flow out of His eyes. Along the path there are rows of beautiful flowers, perfect in form and color. They are lifting their heads so as to receive the full shine of the light that comes from Him. These are flowers here such as Crisje has never seen before, their stems and twigs are hidden in all the blossoms. Some have white flowers which remind Crisje of large daisies, while others have a multitude of colors and are more like orchids, those flowers which, Crisje was told once, are so expensive that only rich

people can afford them. Here, however, they are blooming for everybody, she knows it. In the branches there are birds, and now and then one of them is spreading his wings and flies on high so as to be nearer to Him Whose eyes are looking upon her and on the beauty all around.

To the right and left there are proud castles, some of whose pointed towers are reaching through the layer of clouds into the sky. Crisje calls these Cathedrals.

She is looking around for Jeus, but she cannot see him, yet she feels that he is right next to her. And right near her there walks Hendrik. Of course, he has to be near her, for without him she would not be able to enjoy all this splendor. All her joys are Hendrik's joys.

The further they are going, the more perfect and sublime the surroundings grow. And suddenly Crisje gives a start: She is still wearing her working clothes; how can she enter the courts of Our Good Lord in an apron and wooden shoes? But then she is brought to a small brook and in the clear, silvery water she can see herself. Why, what a surprise! She's almost scared, gasping for breath: Instead of her black jacket she is wearing a blue gown which is draped around her figure in sweeping folds. Her feet are clad in silver shoes, such as are worn by princesses. Her hair is blonde and it falls down her shoulders in long curls. And upon her chest there is fastened a little cross of the purest gold, studded with gems.

For a long time it has been her secret desire to own such a cross, but she has never told anybody, not even her Hendrik.

And now it seems to her that she has grown a little taller, and her Hendrik seems to be somewhat smaller than before, so that they both make a beautiful couple.

Crisje realizes that she is in the "Outer Courts" of Our Dear Lord. Father Reenen had taught her once that this was where Christ had once sojourned. The thought drives the tears into her eyes and her hands are folded in prayer.

Now they are standing still. Once more they gaze at the beauty of this paradise, then Crisje raises her eyes up and her lips utter the words which contain all her gratitude and her love; she says: "My Father!" Carried by the fragrance of the flowers and trees, lifted by the music that comes from the golden throats of the birds the words ascend through the clouds, upward to Him, bringing before His throne the expression of a grateful human being, grateful for the life that He has given to the earth. Slowly the skies are darkening, now, trees, cathedrals, they all are dissolving in the twilight and with a light shock Crisje realizes that she is back home, in her little house. And at the same moment Jeus, who was sleeping on the floor, is awakening, too.

Crisje finds it hard to take up her daily work again, but Jeus is helping her here in his own way: he climbs up on her lap and rests his head against her breast; he wants to eat. And while Crisje is nursing him, she finds the necessary time to think over all the things which she has experienced in that dream, which she has seen sitting in the chair.

"Drink, Jeus, help yourself, you have earned it." Crisje looks at her child. "My God, who are you, little fellow, that you should cause your mother to dream in broad daylight? I'm sure that there's no mother in the whole neighborhood who has ever witnessed such things."

As Jeus is satisfied, Crisje places him into his cradle and he actually falls asleep at once.

The time is passing much too slowly; Crisje can hardly wait till Hendrik comes home so that she can tell him of all the things that have happened to her today. But the clock does not hurry; it goes just as slowly as on other days.

At last she hears Hendrik's long steps. She rushes to the front door to meet him. Throwing her arms around his neck she kisses him again and again, endlessly, until she is all out of breath.

"Oh, Hendrik, I have so much to tell you. But first let's calm down."

Then at last they are sitting at the table, opposite each other.

"If only nobody'll come to visit us now, Hendrik. Shall I lock the door?" Hendrik's confusion grows.

"Why, Cris, is that necessary? I shall see to it that whoever may come in will go out quickly again, no matter who it may be. But where's Jeus, Cris? Doesn't Jeus have to eat?"

"He doesn't need any more. He's been asleep already for several hours; no, all afternoon. I'll tell you everything, but please don't make fun of me." And Crisje reports:

"Jeus has spoken. He has said, 'Cris—long man.' I went almost crazy with joy."

"Did he say that, Cris?" His face shows happy surprise.

"Yes, and as clearly as you or I would say it, just like a grown-up. You can understand how happy I am. But listen, the best is yet to come. Trui was here, and I told her how happy I was, and then she said something, too. As she was here I went and kissed our little boys, good and heartily as I had never done before, and that caused a lot of trouble for me."

"Trouble? What trouble,—from the kissing?" Hendrik

is surprised, but then he suddenly seems to understand and he says: "Well, go on, Cris."

"Yes, then I went over to her house, in order to make her feel good again, and I asked her if she wanted to kiss the boys."

"And did she do it, Cris?"

"Yes, and she was very nice to the children, Hendrik," said Crisje.

"Thank God, if she hadn't, I would have told her something."

"Well, then I went home again, Hendrik. I was sitting there by the stove while Jan and Bernard were playing outside, and Jeus was sitting there looking around. I was thinking: You are looking so, little fellow, I'd really like to know what you are seeing. You know, his eyes became so big." Cris showed with her thumb and index finger how big. "At first I did not understand him and so I was disturbing him. He went right down here lying on the floor on his back."

"You didn't let him, Cris, did you?" interrupts the long fellow.

"No, but he didn't want to lie on a pillow."

"And what then, Cris?"

"I lay down right beside him on the floor, but he didn't like that either. Then I went to sit in my chair. And now it comes. If you only will believe me, but I swear to you what I am going to tell you is the truth. Maybe it was just a dream, but I have seen the Outer Courts where the human beings go when they have to go to Our Dear Lord."

That's just a little too much for Long Hendrik:

"Are you still well by reason, Crisje?"

"See, Hendrik, that's what I was afraid of. Listen a little more, maybe then you know what to think of it."

Crisje tells Hendrik her dream. At first, the long fellow finds it hard to suppress a laugh. But he becomes serious again as Crisje is going on with her story. He can see that Crisje herself is firmly convinced of the paradise in which they had been walking, the bright shine on her face tells him so.

Crisje is not telling everything. She is not saying anything about the beggar who received a guilder from her. She thinks that she'll make up for that in some way, for some time she'll not give him anything now. The little gold cross, too, she does not mention.

Hendrik runs to the cradle, and, as if he had been expecting his daddy, little Jeus opens his eyes just at that moment.

"There's Jeus for you, Hendrik. A child of less then one year and he can already look into Paradise."

And now the long fellow, too, feels the desire to look into the other world:

"Cris, take him out of the crib for a minute. Put him into my arms, maybe then I can see and feel those things, too."

Jeus is laughing; he stretches himself in his father's arms. Then he looks at father's beautiful mustache. The long fellow is getting goose pimples all over, he is trying so hard to see and feel the Paradise. And then suddenly he cries:

"Cris, I can feel something, and I'm not fooling either. I feel—I—feel—that my pants are all wet from Jeus. . . ."

Hendrik is laughing uproariously and Crisje is smiling, too.

"You can go into another world, maybe, but you can wet, too. Why didn't you warn me first?"

The next morning Crisje leaves the house early. She's going to confession. Father Reenen listens to her story about the dream. At last he says: "You have to come to the rectory, Cris. I have to know more about that. Be thankful to Our Good Lord that He let you enter His Outer Courts, Cris. You are blessed with your child. What you have witnessed is truly wonderful, but don't talk about it to anybody. Nobody would understand it, anyway."

"If he says that, Cris, then I have nothing to say," says Long Hendrik. "I cannot understand it, either, but after all, it did happen to you, heh?"

CHAPTER SIX

*“Don’t take that away from me, for
I cannot live without it . . .”*

C_{RISJE} IS POURING COAL INTO THE STOVE. FROM THE OUTSIDE she can hear the voices of Jan and Bernard who are busy clearing the snow away from the garden path with an old broom. The children wanted to play outside and Crisje could not keep them indoors any more; the children don't mind the cold, they're too much occupied with their playing.

Jeus is playing, too, but in his own little world. With his strong, short legs he climbs on table and chairs and looks around as if he were seeing something. Suddenly he cries: “Ball, ball, mamma.” That's something new with him, now, this “mamma.” He only says that when he is playing, otherwise he says “mother,” just like his two brothers.

Crisje cannot understand what it is that her little boy is running after in the room. But, then, she cannot see what he is seeing. For him, the room is not empty; his little friends are visiting him. These, now, are different children again who have come to play with him. They are all equally as nice to him and they call him right away by his name. They cry “Jeus” and they throw large balls at him that are a-glitter with a thousand little lights. As they

streak through the air, they leave, comet-like, colorful tails behind them, and this gives a great delight to Jeus.

No wonder that he wouldn't even look at his wooden horse or the woollen ducky. Jeus and his little friends are climbing over the chairs and table to catch the beautiful balls with their little hands. And when he has caught one of these wonderful balls, he turns it around and around and cries: "Ball, ball, mamma."

In the corner of the room there stands the tall, friendly man. He looks on as the children are playing and there is a smile around his mouth. Once in a while he throws the ball himself and when the children catch his throw, he laughs happily and claps his hands together. Jeus wanted to tell mother about his big playmate, his friend from whom he has received the gift, as small as he is, to be able to see and move in this strange world which is so entirely different from the one in which father and mother and his little brothers and Aunt Trui are living. Once he said to his mother: "Cris, long man," but Crisje thought that he meant by "long man" his own father. Too bad that she does not know this "long man," thinks the child, for she would certainly like him very much. He is tender and friendly and has a mustache and beard just like daddy. This "long man" once clapped his hands together and look, all kinds of beautiful birds came flying in from everywhere. They are sitting on his shoulder, chatter busily and move their little heads as if they were telling him how glad they are to be here and to play with the children. And the children spread their arms and, lo, flap-flap come the birds to them and alight on their hands with glistening eyes and tipping tailfeathers.

Usually, Jeus is playing till he is tired and falls asleep

lying on the floor. But this afternoon he has something on his mind. While mother is working in the kitchen, he slips out through the back door into the yard. Soon he is missed by his mother and, after much searching and calling, she finds him in the rear where the rabbit-coops are. He is trying the little doors but cannot open them. He wants mother to help him, at least he is pulling Crisje towards the coops with a helpless expression on his face. But she doesn't understand and wants to pick him up to carry him back to the warm room. But Jeus is resisting, pointing all the while to the coops. Then finally she begins to understand; she takes out two of the smallest rabbits and lets them run around in the room.

Jeus is dancing with pleasure. Now he, too, has living playthings, just as his little friends from the other world. With a radiant face he lifts the animals up. But suddenly the tears are welling up in his eyes: his playthings cannot fly, he discovers to his consternation; the rabbits are falling down like cobblestones and run for safety away, under the bed. Jeus is not yet convinced; he tries it again, but the result is the same. His tall friend sees his grief and, in Jeus' own language he says to him: "You mustn't think that the children here don't understand. They do. You don't have to be ashamed, hear? They are very happy that you are doing your best, anyway."

Crisje is sorry for the poor rabbits. She brings them back to their coops. But Jeus doesn't like that at all; he wants to cry, but his little friends are telling him that he may not do that,—they don't want to play with crying children. Then Jeus is quiet.

Vanny is coming into the room and now he wants to show them his dog. Vanny has been rolling out in the snow

and is shaking himself on the threshold so that the snowflakes fly all around. But, as soon as Jeus has put his hands on him, he holds very still. Just like Jeus, he is looking to the right and to the left as if he were seeing something, too. Then he begins to bark, long and loud. Mother Crisje does not understand it, because she cannot know that Vanny, who, after all, is but a common mongrel, is however just as much at home in the invisible world as his little master, and that he is now welcoming his little friends there. But later on, Crisje has to laugh when she sees how Vanny, urged on by Jeus, is walking on his hind legs like a prince of royal blood. Jeus is looking on triumphantly. Vanny has never done that before.

In time, Crisje is witnessing more and more of such incidents and she is not surprised any more. She doubts that she'd ever be able to explain these things to Father Reenen, yes, even to her Hendrik. She keeps it all in her own heart and has her own thoughts about it. No wonder, then, that she is hardly noticing the long, grey winter outside.

The cold, the snow and freezing weather mean nothing to mother Crisje. Her happiness is within the house, with Hendrik, with Jan, Bernard and Jeus and with the new life that is created in her body: Crisje is to be a mother again, and in the months that follow, her thoughts travel back to the time when she was expecting Jeus. And the wish grows within her, to be able to feel again that great calm and rest which had been with her then. But as time is passing, she finds that the feelings which are coming from this new, young life within her are quite different; she could call it almost restlessness.

She is talking with Hendrik about it. But, what can he say to this? What does a man, after all, know of the mys-

terious one-ness that exists between two souls during the time that they are living in the same body? Long Hendrik has different things to worry about. Soon there will be six people who have to live from the work of his hands.

It is summer. The earth opens in fields and gardens and presents the fruits of her body to the life-giving rays of the sun. And mother Crisje bears her fourth child.

And again Mina Voort is right: It is a boy. They call him Gerrit. Mother is crying so loud this time that the children are looking at each other in apprehension. Jan is very angry at the stork who has been so rough with his mother "that she has to scream like that." Neither is he satisfied with his new little brother; his face is so wrinkled, just like that of a little old man, he thinks.

It was a difficult birth and it takes weeks for Crisje to recover.

"One more birth like that," says Mina, "and Hendrik can bring Crisje to the cemetery."

Jeus is helping his mother to pass away the time which is heavy on her hands. They cannot drag him away from the cradle; to see his new little brother he has to climb on a chair. Also his friends are coming, to see the tiny human being which is lying there. They are floating through the room, just like the glittering balls with which they had been playing then.

One day he is asking Crisje: "Do you still have pain in your belly, mother?" The child, not much more than two feet high, looks seriously into her face. Then he says: "You're not going to die yet, mother."

For a moment Crisje says nothing. She tries to think out the meaning of his words. She doesn't ask herself from where the child might have this knowledge, she just ac-

cepts it as if it were coming directly from Our Dear Lord. She pulls her child towards her and is holding both his hands in her own. "I know it, Jeus, I'll stay with you and your brothers."

Two days later she is in convulsions from the pains in her abdomen. Jeus, without saying a word, places his little hands upon her body and almost at once Crisje feels that the pain is leaving her completely. And then, once in a while he comes with a carrot to his mother: "Eat that, mother. It's good for you." And Crisje eats it.

Then comes the day when she's getting up. Her face is drawn and white. Her legs are trembling and almost unable to carry her body; Crisje is glad as she comes to the chair where she can sit down. Long Hendrik can see how sick she still is and he implores her to go back to bed.

"No, Hendrik. You may laugh at me, but in two weeks I'll be as good as new again." That's her only answer, and she stays out of bed.

"Where do you get that, Cris?" says Long Hendrik with a doubtful look.

Promptly she answers: "From Our Good Lord." And this is something Hendrik does not understand. Then Crisje tells him of a dream which she had the other night. There, Our Good Lord told her:

"Crisje, you'll get well quickly, but you have to use all your own strength first before I come and add mine to it."

And mother Crisje shows that she understands these words. She is doing her work, her willpower is making her legs move, but, at last she is at the end of her strength. The blood is leaving her face, her knees are giving in and she sinks down. But at that moment, as she has really used all her own strength, a new power is coming over her, and

Crisje knows where it is coming from. And two weeks later she is the Crisje of old again.

Crisje doesn't have to remind her Long Hendrik of her prophecy. He places a bunch of flowers into her arms, and, lifting her up very carefully, he closes her mouth with a kiss.

Jeus is sitting at their feet. Suddenly he says:

"Daddy, you have to buy a little cross for mommy."

This is too much for Crisje. She starts to snicker and finally tells Hendrik of the beautiful golden cross which she has been wearing in her dream and of her desire to own one like that. "Our Good Lord has told Jeus," says she.

Long Hendrik has to digest all this first, and he is doing this in his own way. He runs out of the house and walks with long steps on the gravel path. He is tired and stops, and there he finds himself standing at Hent Klink's saloon. He hasn't been here for months. He wants to warm himself up and already from the door he calls to Hent: "Gi'me a good strong vermouth, Hent."

"Got a tummy ache, Henk?"

Long Hendrik has to laugh. He cannot possibly talk here about the things that have happened at home, why he has run out and why he wants now a vermouth, and, maybe after that a whiskey, and then another.

"No, not a tummy ache, but sometimes you can get too much of a good thing, also."

"Too much of a good thing? Who wouldn't want that, now? I've never heard you say anything like that yet. If that isn't something!" He places the glass down before Hendrik and asks:

"And how is it with Cris, Hendrik?"

"Oh, a little better."

"Gerrit Noesthede is going away again, isn't he? I heard that he has to go to Italy and France."

Long Hendrik laughs out loud. Gerrit has been at it again, and Hent who really should know better, did actually fall for it. "Aren't you wise yet, Hent? You let Gerrit fool you like that? I thought you'd know him better."

"Sure I know him,—but with Gerrit you never know where you stand. As a rule I can see right through him, but sometimes I just cannot make him out."

Long Hendrik takes the last sip from his glass; the alcohol is warming his blood.

"Another one, Hendrik? Such a vermouth is really good, I like it myself. The Missus, too. But it doesn't agree with her. Don't you want to take some along for Cris? That's always good, it peeps her up, especially if you put an egg in it."

"Yes, yes," says Hendrik, lost in thought; he is not even listening to the innkeeper. "You keep on talking," he thinks, and lets Hent prattle. He is thinking of Crisje, of Jeus, the dream and the little cross.

"And how is Jeus?" continues Hent without stopping. "Is it true what Mina Voort is saying? Is he really such a clever fellow? You have four, now, and all boys, what? When they start to earn money you can take it easy, and Crisje, too. She's working too hard anyway, as it is. I can tell you that, Hendrik, this last one, that wasn't any good, she shouldn't have done that."

Hendrik is suddenly all attention. What was it that Hent was saying there? What is he insinuating? Does he know anything about Cris of which he, Hendrik, doesn't know? He is looking attentively at Hent and nods his head

just as if he were completely in agreement with him, that Crisje shouldn't have done "that." He has to pump this fellow and find out what he is talking about.

"Yes," says he, "when they grow up, I'll know it, to be sure. Then I'll buy myself a good violin and play all day long. Sure, Cris is working too hard, but what can I do?"

"But it really is not necessary that she works so hard, or is it, Hendrik?"

Hendrik is now still none the wiser and it makes him feel hot under the collar. "There are so many things which we don't have to do, Hent, but we do them anyway. That's the way we are made." He is looking into the fat, puffed-up face of the innkeeper who is hanging with his belly over the edge of the counter.

"That's true, Hendrik, we haven't made ourselves, but still, we can do as we please. There are plenty of loafers who are doing nothing all day long, just walk around on the street. Last week Bad van Gelder was here with his horse and wagon, and he asked one of those bums to watch his horse; and you know how Bad is, he wouldn't expect anybody to do something for nothing, but what do you think, that bum wouldn't do it?"

Hendrik became all red in his face, he shifted from one leg to the other. That rascal was bringing Crisje in connection with loafers and bums,—but why? And what did he mean by "she shouldn't have done that"?

"Is there something wrong with you, Hendrik? It isn't cold in here, is it!"

Long Hendrik forces a laugh, but there is something annoying him. Yes, there is something wrong with him, but not the way Hent is thinking.

"I think that this cold weather is getting the best of me.

Give me another drink. You said that Bad asked that hobo something and he didn't do it, that's what I wanted to ask you: are there so many hobos around now?" Well, maybe he'd find out now what he wanted to know.

"Sure, don't you know that? Yes, you're all day long in Emmerik, so maybe you don't know, heh? But I'm standing behind my bar from morning to night and I can see what's going on. They're calling on Crisje, too,—really much too much, if I may say so, but you know that probably yourself, Hendrik. Only that it shouldn't make any difference to you, I can't see that, Hendrik . . ."

Poor Long Hendrik feels hot and cold, he is clenching his fists. Shouldn't make any difference to him? What does he mean? What is it that shouldn't make any difference to him? Dammit, all this wouldn't mean anything to him if Crisje weren't involved, somehow, in a way he cannot understand. Isn't it strange,—Crisje?

Long Hendrik has no more opportunity to ask questions; the door opens and Jan the watchmaker steps in.

"Good evening, everybody,—hello Hent, hello Hendrik. It's nice here, eh?" Rubbing his hands he steps closer, crimps his collar down and unbuttons his jacket. In one swallow he takes his vermouth. Then he asks for another, shoving his glass towards Hent.

If Hendrik wants to know more from Hent, he'll have to bide his time. And he decides to wait, no matter how long it'll take him.—Empty gossip, of course, that's all. But —Crisje and the loafers,—What does that mean?

"Dammit, Hent, your watch, that's some old potato. I have a big piece of work there. If I had known that in the first place I would have advised you to buy a new one.

That thing is almost completely worn out. Must be at least a hundred years old."

The arrival of Jan the watchmaker reminds Hendrik again of the little gold cross. The feelings in his heart are in conflict; Jan is selling such little crosses, but,—does Crisje really deserve one? Dammit, he keeps no secrets from her, so why should there be anything he doesn't know of? Something she won't tell him? Look here, he won't take that,—never! He's going to show the world who Big Long Hendrik is! Now he tries very hard to become angry, very angry,—terribly angry at Crisje, but—it doesn't work. And he is surprised to hear his own voice:

"Say, Jan, you are selling little crosses in your shop, aren't you?"

"Why, sure, Hendrik. Only today I got some beautiful new ones in. Do you want one for Crisje? Just come with me for a minute, you can pick your choice."

No. Big Hendrik is not going along. He lets Jan go alone, that'll give him the chance he's waiting for. There is something with Crisje, so he thinks, there's something she is doing which she shouldn't. But there seems to be something with Hent, too, for as Jan has left, he says with a confidential twinkle in his watery eyes:

"That guy can never get enough; he's bursting with greed and he always pulls a smooth line on everybody. But we know him all right. Do you have to buy such a thing for Crisje, now, I'm asking you? Chisel him down, Hendrik, he's asking too much. But you know how to do that, don't you? And does he like his drinks! Eight kids he's got, and with such a sick wife, ha! What do you make of that? I, well I can't understand it, hml!"

Long Hendrik suddenly feels like fighting, he wants to place his fist right into that fat, ugly face to make him shut up. The dirty gossip! But now Hent Klink is mentioning Crisje.

"... and I wanted to tell you, Hendrik, that there are so many loafers around who don't want to work. And they like to knock at Crisje's door; all right, if I say it myself,—from me they'll always get a handout, sure, but I know where to stop, and most people don't."

Long Hendrik is trying to control himself. A hot fury is rising up in his long body. With a drawn face and squinting eyes he asks Hent:

"Do you mean to say that Crisje is doing too much for those loafers?"

"Don't get angry now, Hendrik. Sure, she's doing much too much for those guys." Then he continues with a hypocritical smile:

"She does her work well, sure, everybody knows that, Hendrik, she's a woman,—one in a million, you know that better than I, Hendrik," and then, letting go of the edge of the counter and moving back a step or so, he continues:

"... but to bake pots full of potatoes for those bums and then, on top of it to give them so much money to buy drinks, that's too much, Hendrik, that's too much, it's really crazy, eh? That's taking it away from your own children, and from you, too. You have to work hard enough, is it true or isn't it? ..."

Now it has been said. For months Hent Klink had been waiting for this moment. Why, don't you pay any attention to him, Hendrik, he's a little, poisonous snake who likes nothing better than to blacken his fellow beings. Don't soil your hands on this dirty pig. Crisje shall tell

you why she's giving and why she's giving so much. "Yes, but . . ."

No, Hendrik, there's no "yes" and no "but," what Crisje does is good and well, you know that, Hendrik.

You want to take that rascal who is gossiping about everybody and drag him across the bar and close his dirty mouth with your fists, . . . you want to . . . But what would Crisje do in this case? Well, what?

Crisje? She wouldn't even get angry at him. She would only think that he is a talker, poor "as a louse," without honesty and faith, a man who is corrupted through his unclean surroundings, his barroom where he is standing all day long gulping whiskey. . . .

Hendrik is holding on to the edge of the bar, but his grip loosens. And as Jan is coming back he takes no more notice of Hent and says to the watchmaker:

"Did you bring your little crosses? I want a nice one, a real nice one, I don't care what it costs, it is for Crisje," and with these last words he just throws a glance at Klink.

"Look for yourself, Hendrik, I've got some real fine crosses here. Look, this one is beautiful. Wouldn't that be nice for Crisje? Hasn't it got a beautiful shine? It comes directly from Jerusalem, Hendrik, it's made of the wood of the cross of Our Good Lord. No, don't think that I'm blaspheming, the salesman who sold it to me, he told me so himself, and he ought to know, don't you think so? It's just the thing for Cris, especially when she knows that this is so."

"I don't want a wooden one, Jan,—I want one of gold; it's for Cris," says Long Hendrik stubbornly.

"All right, then this one, Hendrik; it's called the Sacred Light, see? You ought to see that by lamp light, then it

glitters like the eternal light in our church, and it's a good buy for these few cents."

"How much, Jan?"

"Here, Hendrik, look for yourself. I don't want to earn anything on you. Number thirty-two, it costs . . . let me see . . ." He drags a soiled piece of paper out of his pocket. "Look, Hendrik, here, seven guilders and a half. Too much? Just say so, I'll wait ten years for you to pay me, Hendrik, if I have to. It's just right for Cris, she's too fine a person to wear a cheap one."

Long Hendrik is looking first at Jan, then at the shining little cross. Would Crisje like this one? He takes another drink and stares into his glass as if he could read there what he has to do. "You know what, Jan? You go with me to Crisje and then she can take her own choice." He pays for the drinks; as he is looking at the short, plump fingers that are scooping up the money, and as he hears the nasty, ugly voice of Hent, his fury rises up again, but he controls himself. With a short "'dnight" Hendrik and Jan leave.

The two men are walking through the cold evening air and Jan has to trot in order to keep pace with Hendrik's long legs. His steps sound hollow on the frozen ground. Jan says: "Now you have another boy to worry about, Hendrik, number four, eh? I know how it is, I have to feed eight, and Minny isn't well at all . . ."

Long Hendrik says "yes." He is thinking of Klink's talk: "He's greedy, Jan is, and he has a smooth line. Jan is asking too much, ha, and just imagine, he has to feed eight children, and a sick wife on top of it,—that's something, eh?" How mean human beings can be to each other, how dirty, Hendrik is thinking, and again he curses: Damn gossip!

It is easy to chide others for their poverty and misery when your own belly is full, but it is even worse to talk about people behind their backs and then to pick up their money with a dirty laugh. Why didn't he punch that guy in the nose? Furiously Hendrik's boots are stomping the ground; Hendrik is letting it out now on the poor, innocent cobblestones.

"I'm back, Cris."

"I was already thinking where's Hendrik all this while?"

"How are you, Crisje?" Jan's greeting is cordial.

"A little better, Jan."

Jan puts a little package on the table and begins to open it.

"Look here, Crisje, this will help you get well again." Hendrik smiles all over his face. Crisje is looking at the little crosses. She claps her hands together and cries:

"Good heavens, Hendrik, no, you shouldn't do that. That's too much for me." But her eyes are shining with joy.

"Don't cry now, Crisje, just pick out the one you like best. Jan wants to earn a little money too, what, Jan?"

"But—but Hendrik, they're too expensive."

"Nothing is too expensive. Take your choice."

"All right, then, I'll take this one." Crisje selects a little cross with a shining stone in the center. She looks at it proudly and her eyes are searching for those of Hendrik. But the two men are already talking about something else.

"How is it at home, Jan?" asks Crisje as she sees that he wants to go. "How is Minny?"

"A little better, thank God, but she is still very weak. She has so much trouble with her intestines."

"What is her complaint, Jan?"

"She has always pains in her abdomen, penetrating pains, and at that she has so much work to do."

"I'll prepare some herbs for her, they'll help."

"I should be very happy if you'd do that for her. I'll tell her, and I'll tell Kathie how to use them. But now I'm going home. I hope you have a good sleep, all of you."

Long Hendrik is sitting at the table, one hand under his head, the other one in his pocket. He is staring at the tablecloth as if he were seeing something there. Crisje has been looking at him several times already and she cannot wait till he is saying something.

"What are you thinking of, Hendrik?"

"I've a lot to think of, Crisje, quite a lot." His answer is slow and rather dreamy.

"What is it then?" She cannot understand his sudden moodiness, especially now, after he has given her such a splendid present.

"Do you want to know?"

"Yes, of course."

"All right, then listen well, now." He is pulling her towards him and lifts her upon his lap. "This is the day when you will tell me all the things for the whole year. Right? Will you tell me now what all those loafers are doing here in our house? I know that you were giving something here and there to the poor, but so much, Crisje, that's really silly. You are crazy, Cris."

Calmly she is listening to him. Her conscience is clear and her Hendrik will understand her, she knows it.

"Hent Klink told you that, didn't he?" she says quietly.

"He is always carrying tales. He should rather watch himself a little better. He is even making his customers angry at each other. That's dangerous, Hendrik. You have to listen

to me now, Hendrik. No, Hendrik . . ." she puts her small hand upon his mouth ". . . first let me finish. You don't know everything, but it isn't any of your business, anyway."

"Oh, yes?—What are you saying now?" Hendrik is flying off the handle. But he has to be quiet now. Crisje wants it so and therefore he cannot say anything.

"That's because you have nothing to do with it, Hendrik. Now I have to tell you something. You know how much I think of you. Our marriage,—nobody can touch that and you should never let anybody, either. Never, hear me, Hendrik? We must stick together, Hendrik. If I am planting potatoes and give them to the beggars in winter-time to eat, then I know why I am doing that. Nobody in the family is getting less to eat for this. And I am not crazy for that, either. What you do for charity is always good. Now,—some months ago I told you of my dream. I forgot then to tell you that in my excitement I gave a beggar one guilder. Later, when I was doing some shopping, I saw that man go into Hent Klink's barroom. He must've blabbered something there. It shall not happen again, Hendrik. But if I want to give away potatoes, potatoes that grow in the ground for nothing, where only a little work is needed to plant them, no, Hendrik, I won't let anybody take that away from me, not even you, and if you were Our Good Lord Himself."

"So," thinks Crisje, "that'll hold him for a while." And it does hold him, for Long Hendrik feels like slapping himself with his own hand for having listened to Klink and his gossip and for having had any doubts in his Crisje. His face loses that drawn expression and his hands feel soft again and tender as he is taking Crisje's hand.

"Are you angry now, Hendrik, that I haven't told you everything, and that I have acted as I did? Can you forgive me? Believe me, Hendrik, don't listen any more to the gossip of those people. They cannot see it that we are happy together. God knows that I would not do anything wrong, Hendrik, and what I am doing, I can answer for. I am taking good care of you and of the children, but don't take that away from me, for I cannot live without it."

They kiss. In Crisje's eyes there are some lonely tears, and Long Hendrik,—he suddenly has to look towards the corner of the room and blow his nose. Then he says:

"I am not going to take this away from you. I know you now better than ever before, Cris." And Crisje,—she can still say: "Our Dear Lord is giving me strength . . ." the rest remains unsaid, Hendrik is closing her mouth with his kisses. And before them on the table there lies the little cross and it glitters so much the brighter for the gleam of the table lamp that is reflecting from the small gem in its center—or could the joy have something to do with it that is in the hearts of these two happy human beings?

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Jeus is with the pigeons, mother...”

JEUS HAS DISCOVERED A NEW WORLD. HIS QUICK LITTLE LEGS are carrying him there, to the budding, blooming garden. His great eyes full of wonderment, he stands there on the path for a long time. In his memory this garden had been a grey, sad spot where the flowers were standing around like so many sighing, old men. Only once did he really think that it was beautiful; it was on that morning when Jan and Bernard had nudged each other in the ribs and cried out: “It has been snowing!” Then Jeus, too, had run to the window and seen that the entire world had turned white in one single night. Those little old men seemed to be much happier, surely because they were glad about their new white coats.

Vanny had run around in excitement and dug into the heavy white blanket until the flakes began to stick to his black nose.

And now here is Jeus, standing with both his little legs in Paradise. He cannot recognize that garden; it is not a dry and sad place any more and the old men have disappeared. And Jeus does not say a word. He just looks and looks, for this world is green and friendly; he falls down upon his little knees and learns about his Paradise.

And from day to day the garden is becoming more green, also red and pink with flowers, yellow, white, blue and violet. As soon as mother Crisje opens the garden gate,

Jeus is right behind her. On his knees he crawls around to visit his new friends: heads of lettuce, radishes, cabbage,—the violets, the roses and the great big sunflowers.

"What do you think you have your legs for, you don't have to crawl on your knees."

But Jeus does not even listen to her. He is lying on his little tummy and looks with great, dreamy eyes into the heart of a beautiful daisy.

Crisje is trying to get rid of the weeds in the garden. Sometimes she is working for days and days, pulling these hardy plants out with their roots. And Jeus is helping her here. He fights with the same spirit and courage, but unfortunately, his attacks are not directed only against the weeds, no, he also pulls out the cabbage and the radishes, yes, everything that comes under his strong little hands.

Crisje hasn't enough eyes to watch him. Every once in a while she is calling to him: "Don't do that, Jeus,—all these plants have to become ripe, first. Our Good Lord will be angry at you if you do that, don't you know? That's a sin, Jeus, and it's bad."

But this does not make any impression upon Jeus. As soon as she has bent down again to her work, another victim falls under his quick, little hands. He looks at the lettuce; then, with a big laugh, he throws the leaves up into the air.

"My goodness, I have seen him do something like that before, where was that now, let me think,—oh, yes, I remember, it was with the rabbits. Then he wanted to throw the poor beasts up into the air, and now the lettuce. He is playing again."

But when a red cabbage begins to fly around, too, Crisje thinks that this is too much. Now it is Jeus himself who is

being taken up into the air and a moment later he can look at the garden only through the window, from the inside of the house.

He doesn't like that. Quickly he finds the way out through the front door and into the garden—of Aunt Trui.

Mother Crisje has gone back to her work. Then she goes into the house to prepare the meal, and in the meantime she has completely forgotten about Jeus. Only as Long Hendrik is coming home and is asking: "Where is Jeus?" Crisje misses her little boy.



Behind the house, in the garden of Aunt Trui it is quiet. Here, Jeus is undisturbed. His little friends are playing with him and admire the flowers and plants.

Among his playmates there is one little boy with whom Jeus is playing busily; his name is José. Finally the other children are leaving, waving their little hands as a farewell, but José remains with Jeus, playing and talking.

"Lie down on your back, Jeus," he is saying, "then I'll let you see where I live."

As Jeus has fallen asleep and gone into the bright and wide world of José he sees there his old friend, the "long man." Jubilantly he runs towards him, while José stands there looking on with a laugh.

Holding his little playmate by the hand, José takes Jeus along and brings him to a splendid garden, more beautiful even than that of mother Crisje or Aunt Trui. Jeus cannot see enough. The flowers here are greeting José happily and ask him who his new companion is. José says: "Jeus," and the flowers are whispering this name to each other so that even those way back there become acquainted with him. "Jeus" it is lisping in the leaves, and the birds are singing the name and tell it to the trees, and through the whole garden goes the tune: Jeus—Jeus—Jeus, so that he almost feels bashful for it.

The children are looking around with their eyes wide open. As they are walking around, the birds, one by one, are flying towards them and sit on their shoulders and outstretched hands. They let the children stroke their little heads. José is calling them by their names, and Jeus is repeating them. The flowers high on their long stems are bowing their heads. As Jeus is bending over them to kiss their fragrant hearts they return his greetings with their

beautiful scent. And from the fruit trees the sweetest gifts are falling down to Jeus and José.

"You have to eat of these, Jeus," says José. "They are for you. Take as many as you like."

And Jeus drives his sharp teeth into the delicious fruits so that the juice is running out between his little fingers; he fills his tummy to capacity. There are no weeds in this garden, anywhere, and the trees haven't even one faded leaf.

"What is this here where you live? Is it heaven?"

"No, not exactly, but it is very much like it, heh? It's only a little bit of heaven. The real heaven is over there, Jeus, it is much further, but there I'll be going later on."

"May I come along? And daddy and mommy, and Bernard and Jan?"

"Yes, you all may come, Jeus, if only you'll be good and do your best."

"But not the booze woman, Mrs. de Man, heh? Not she?"

"Oh yes, Jeus, she may come too, if she will be good."

"And Gerrit Noesthede, who is full of nonsense and foolishness?"

"All the people can come if only they'll do their best and are good."

"Say, José," says Jeus after a little while and grabs his little friend by the arm so that he stops short; "where is the big long fellow now who looks exactly like my daddy?"

"He has something else to do right now, but he'll be back right away, when you'll have to go home."

And with every step the children see new, marvelous things.

"Look, José, just look."

From the shadow of a gigantic tree three birds are coming. One behind the other they are flying in great circles, lower and lower until at last they are almost touching the tips of the flowers. Finally they come to rest on a low branch where the children are looking at them with wonderment. They cannot turn their eyes away from the glistening little animals. It is as if Our Good Lord had tried all the colors of His rainbow on these soft, beautiful feathers.

"Want to have a close look at them, Jeus?"

"O-o-oh, José. . . ."

"Shall I call one of them for you? Which one?"

"This one, there, the one next to the tree trunk."

José has only to look at the bird, and already he comes a-flying towards the children. He flutters around their heads, and as José is reaching out his hand, he finally alights there.

"Come here a minute, Jeus, just look at these little feathers."

Cautiously Jeus comes closer; he does not want to chase the bird away. But the little animal remains unafraid. The little eyes are like black beads and they look at the young human being. Jeus strokes the beautiful feathers and thinks that he has never in his life touched anything so heavenly as this. The other two birds are coming now, too, and they make themselves at home on the shoulders of the children. They even like it when Jeus is stroking their little heads.

Then suddenly they spread their wings. Swooping in large circles they are flying off, onwards, upwards, towards the clouds, finally disappearing like shimmering arrows.

Jeus is looking after them. He has forgotten his environment. But José is shaking him by the arm: "Jeus, Jeus, here's an apricot."

They are shaking a tree and from its crown there come the sweet fruits, falling down into the soft moss.

"They're good to eat. I'll have some, too."

"Wow, are they good! May I take some along for mother? She's been so sick."

"No," says José, "you cannot do that. These are for you. You can eat them only here, when you are out of your own body, as you are now. Do you understand this, Jeus?"

Yes, Jeus can understand it, but he will surely tell mother about all this.

"By golly, aren't they good. Here you wouldn't need anything else to eat, they're a full meal in themselves. At home they are eating all kinds of food, but that would make me throw up, now that I've tasted this. Do you still like those meals on earth, José?"

"No, not I, and neither do any people who have come here to live. But we don't need this any more here. What you are eating there is for that body which is sleeping down there in the garden of Aunt Trui. He needs it, but the way you are now, you don't need anything like that."

"I can understand that well. But do the people know that too? Can they understand this?"

"There are some who do, but most of them don't know anything about this. They don't know anything about our life here."

"José, do they sing here, too?"

"And how! Jeus, all day long."

"As beautifully as my father does?"

"Yes, and even more beautifully, for here thousands of

people are singing together. But now you'll have to go back home, there's your long man already."

"When are you coming to fetch me again, José?"

José does not answer immediately. He is looking at the long man. He says: "We'll see about that some time. If you watch out carefully, we might come around again."

The two little friends are embracing each other. Then the long man is taking the child in his arms. Jeus presses his little head against him and looks into the large, shining eyes of his big friend.

"My boy," says the long man as they have come to the still sleeping body of Jeus, and he is still hearing these words as he is awakening, lying in the bushes of the garden of Aunt Trui. He rubs his eyes and gets up.

His little brother is looking for him. "Jeus, Jeus, where are you?" He is running home.

Big Long Hendrik is not very friendly as he receives him. He looks severely at his boy: "Where have you been?"

Everybody's eyes are directed at the little fellow. He is standing there, quietly, by the side of the table. His eyes are going from one to the other, to rest finally upon his mother.

"Come here to me, Jeus." His father is taking him on his lap. "Where have you been?"

The child thinks for a long time. Then he says simply: "I was in heaven, father."

"What?" Long Hendrik doesn't know what to say to this. Never yet has a child told him that he has been "in heaven."—"What? You've been in heaven?"

His brothers are breaking into a laugh. Now Long Hendrik knows better what to do: each one is getting a slap from his long arms, one—two, just like that.

"So, you were in heaven, heh? And what have you been doing there?"

"I've eaten apples and pears, and—and—something else, I don't know what it was, I've forgotten the name."

"Well, that's too bad, Jeus, but you'll have to eat something here, too," says mother.

"No, mother, I don't want to eat, I don't like it, it makes me throw up." With these words he is bringing himself and his dad back to earth.

"You have nothing to say around here, do you know that? What mother cooks tastes good, her food is the best," says father brusquely. "Where have you been with him, Cris, that he's been outside so long?"

"I had forgotten about him. He was with me in the garden, but he pulled out all the good vegetables. Then I put him out of the garden and he must've gone into Trui's garden after that. You know how he is sometimes,—he was throwing the lettuce and the cabbage up in the air, so that it was flying all over."

Father begins to joke: "That shows artistic talent," says he. "Maybe he'll be an artist, when he grows up, then he can paint your portrait. There's good money in that. But he also must learn to sing. He shall sing so that the heavens will come to listen to him. What do you say, Jan?"

Now that daddy is laughing himself, the two boys are becoming boisterous. Bernard breaks into such a laugh that he rolls off his chair. Again, daddy's long arms have to restore order in the room. "Look out, this mustn't happen again. If there is to be any fooling around, I'm here to do it. Understand? What do you have to say? Quick now."

"Yes, daddy." Jan is saying it first.

"And you, little runt? Are you going to say, 'Yes daddy,' quick?"

But Bernard cannot utter a word; while father had been speaking he had seen his chance to put a whole potato into his mouth so that he is now almost suffocating. In his predicament he is bending forward and sideways and his head is becoming as red as fire. For this Long Hendrik has a good remedy; it may be drastic, but it cures: he lays the resisting youngster over his knees and gives him a spanking on his pants: the slaps upon the one end make the potato fly out the other! And while Bernard isn't sure whether he should first hold his hands on his throat or upon the burning seat of his pants, Long Hendrik is picking up the potato, satisfied with the result of his treatment.

"Now look at that, my, what a glutton, Cris. You have to see the 'tater! A cow wouldn't be able to swallow it."

In the meantime Mother Crisje has prepared a plate for Jeus. She is taking him upon her lap and wants to feed him. But curtly he pushes the fork away and says: "I don't want to eat." Long Hendrik steps in here and tries his way. He'll teach this child to eat what is put before him! Jeus is now on Hendrik's knee who is trying with his fork, but the little mouth remains firmly closed. Then daddy's fingers cover his nose and, gasping for air, the little mouth opens. In goes the fork to come out again empty. But, before the second fork is loaded Jeus begins to throw up. Daddy quickly jumps up:

"Dammit, Chris, is there something wrong with him?"

"But you mustn't curse, you," says Crisje. She is already busy cleaning up the mess. With apprehension she takes Jeus into her arms.

"He has really eaten apples and pears. There's no more

room." Crisje is undressing the child and places him into his bed. Jeus is asleep already before he is covered up with his blanket. For a short minute they are standing by the side of his little bed. The child is mumbling: "The long man, the long man."

Hendrik's eyes are becoming big. "You have to hear that, Chris. He's calling me the 'long man.'" He cannot pull himself away from the child that is lying there so quietly now and who has looked into heaven. "Have you been feeling that too, Cris, when you were alone with him,—such a calm, such a—well, such—I don't know what. What is he seeing now in his dreams? I wish he'd say "long man" once more, it sounds so tender, Cris,—I don't mind if he says it this way."

The following day Jeus is not to be separated from his mother. Where she is, that's where he is too. She's talking to him all the while but she's not sure that he's listening. Crisje has gone upstairs to uncover the beds of the boys. Jeus stands there quietly looking on. Now he's getting a hold of mother's skirt.

"Do you have to hold on now, that you've seen heaven?" says she.

Of course, mother knows what is going on in that little head: he is thinking of all the great things which he has experienced together with José while his little body was asleep. Well, maybe that was some garden, there, much bigger and more beautiful than that of mother or of Aunt Trui; everything the children had there was more beautiful. And it was a good thought that, some day, he would go there, too, and then not only for a short time, as when the long man had come for him, but for good. Then he'll eat all those apples and pears and those—well now—those,

those other tasty things, and play with the birds that had been painted by Our Good God in all his colors, at least as José had told him that. Then he'd pick flowers, flowers for mother, so many that he'd have to use both his hands to hold them together. He would—yes, what else? Well, he would have to do his best, yes, his best and be good, otherwise he'd never get to that garden, that beautiful place. It gave him a little shock to think that. Exactly as the booze woman and as Gerrit and all the others, yes, even his daddy and mommy. Mother! He feels that he has to tell her so much, but he cannot find the words. It is too funny. When he is there in that place with José, it is so easy for him to talk, to express all his thoughts. "When you're here, you are older," José had told him once.

But, mother should really know all the things he has seen and heard there! "Do you have to hold on again, now that you've seen heaven?"

"Well, mother, if I only could tell it all in the right way, then we could talk about it together. Then I wouldn't have to carry it around all by myself." But he only swallows, and the words will not come out. It makes him nervous.

Among the fire wood there lies a stick. He takes it up and taps himself on the head. Will that help?

"What are you doing now? Are you crazy?" Mother takes the stick away from him. "Stupid," says she in exasperation.

But the words will still not come. He only says: "But I have to think!"

Crisje looks at him in confusion. "Just listen to that," thinks she, "he has to think already and he is still wetting his pants!" She bursts out laughing, picks up her little boy

and kisses his cheeks until they are as red as fire. But Jeus isn't laughing. And mother wouldn't laugh either if she knew what she is missing just because his tongue is refusing to tell what new, stirring experiences there are in that little head and cannot come out.

By the way, mother's laughing was not to last very long. They hear footsteps on the stairs. Trui is entering, and, without further ado, she begins to reproach and accuse Crisje most severely.

"Your boys have been sitting in my garden. Everything has been pulled out of the ground. Why don't you watch your little gangsters? They're just no good, that's all. When they grow up they'll become arsonists and thieves. Why don't you look after them? Everything has been spoiled, everything."

With great effort Crisje finally contrives to pacify the furious woman and promises that she'll question her boys and find out who the culprit is. She promises to replace from her own garden everything that has been destroyed by her child. At last Trui has left, and only then does Jeus find it opportune to come out from under the bed where he has been hiding all this while from the second on that he had seen the white and furious face of Aunt Trui coming up the stairs.

"Have you been playing in her yard, Jeus?" The little fellow has understood her and says promptly "Yes." And as she is asking him why he has done that and if he wants to promise not to do it again, he, again, answers just as quickly with a straightforward "Yes."

"Now, that's nice of you, Jeus," says Crisje somewhat softened. "You have to eat something, now. Last night you've eaten nothing at all." Yes, Jeus is now very hungry,

mother; those apples and pears from the beautiful garden are not sufficient, his little body needs more, just as José had told him that time, indeed. This young, growing life needs a lot of food, sound, big sandwiches, fats, meat, potatoes. And a little while later Jeus is taking big bites of earthly food. . . .

Mother must have eyes in her back, thinks Jeus. He only has to come near the cabbage and radishes, and mother is right behind him. Now, Jeus is not interested in looking at those vegetables from afar, no, he wants to hold them in his little hands and show them to his playmates, play with them, and since mother is now so watchful, Jeus does not care any more. He goes and looks for new playthings. His wooden horse cannot talk, and neither can the woollen duck. They don't tell him anything and therefore they remain in their box. Living animals are more attractive to him. On his knees he is crawling to their pens, first to the rabbits, then the chickens, and then he'll lie on his tummy for hours to observe the grunting pigs. Mother Crisje doesn't mind that, he couldn't throw the pigs up into the air, and the chickens and rabbits are well cooped up so that he cannot get at them.

Jeus is missing his little friends, they are not coming any more, even when he is lying down to sleep on the ground. He is particularly disappointed about this now that he has new playthings to show to them.

Once, at noontime, he is lost again. Mother Crisje has been looking for him high and low, even sent out Jan and Bernard on a search, but Jeus is lost. Crisje is becoming frightened, now. She runs through the garden, over to Trui's, up the gravel path. Ten, twenty times she is looking for him in the same places, but it is of no avail, not

even the many little prayers which she is uttering in between have any effect.

As Long Hendrik comes home he finds a perplexed Crisje, and a pot of potatoes that have been cooked to pulp. He, too, becomes frightened and shouts: "Jeus,—Jeus," and with his long legs he searches the immediate neighborhood and goes around to all the peasants to ask them if they have seen Jeus. As at last the house is full of excitement, Jan gets a good idea: "I think I know where Jeus is, mother."

"Where, Jan, oh, where?"

"With the pigeons, mother."

Crisje runs upstairs. And truly, there is her little boy lying on his back right in the center of the pigeon coop. Jeus is not really asleep, at least his eyes are wide open. The pigeons have come close all around him and are looking at the strange invader.

Crisje is only too happy that she has found her little boy again, she cannot be angry at him now.

"Don't you want to come down stairs now? What are you doing here, anyway?" But little Jeus does not even move. Then mother takes him into her arms and carries him down, while she is calling him a bad boy who is only making trouble for his parents. But Jeus does not even bat an eyelash.

"It is terrible," says Long Hendrik. "What do you have to go up there for and lie down? Do you want to scare mother? Go and say something, now." But the child doesn't say a word, his eyes are staring into one direction.

Jan says: "He's sleeping with his eyes open. I've never seen that before, mother."

"I haven't either. But he has to eat," and Crisje shakes

Jeus vigorously. At last he awakens. He looks around in a daze, then, after recognizing his surroundings, he begins to cry, tears himself loose and runs back towards the stairs, to his pigeons. . . .

Of all the animals, the doves are the ones that are reminding him most of the world of José and the long man. This noontime he has discovered their coop. At first they flutter away, the shy animals, but in a short time they're coming back and sit on their ladders. Jeus doesn't move. He's lying on his tummy and, with his hands under his chin he admires their graceful little bodies and the shining colors of their feathers.

But then suddenly the pigeon coop and doves are disappearing for Jeus. He is again in the Paradise of José; alone he is running on the broad path. He is looking up, and there are the three birds. They're flying in large circles and finally are coming down. As they are approaching the earth they flap their wings again and in renewed circles they are swooping towards a branch on which they are coming to rest.

Jeus is lying down on the carpet of moss under the tree. He is listening to the birds. He doesn't find it difficult to understand what they are saying, here he is older and wiser, more conscious; the birds' voices are as soft, sweet tunes.

"Your eyes are growing big," says one of them, "as you are looking at the sparkling beauty of our feathers. José was right when he told you that God has given us all the colors which He has in His creation. But you just have to look closely into yourself, into your mother and father and all the others that are around you to find that He gave even more to the human beings whom He has called sparks from His fire."

And now the second bird opens his little beak and says to the boy:

"But the human beings are blinded by the glitter of their riches, Jeus. And with the complaints about their supposed poverty they are not hearing the voices of those who have gone out to help their poor souls and make them wiser.

"Jeus, you are now getting ready to go and open their eyes, to bring spiritual treasures to those on earth. You shall receive help in this from above. Like us, you shall be living between heaven and earth and listen to the voices from the two worlds. From far away your little soul has come to earth to learn, to serve and to give and then to return to us on high above the clouds."

"I am the bird whom you wanted so badly to see from near-by, Jeus," says the third of the birds. "There is no human being who doesn't know me, at least by name. Oh, they admire me and they cannot find words enough to sing my praise. But it is rare, indeed, that they're calling me.

"They know that their hearts are too barren, they fear that I might hurt my little feet, and even the least little plant cannot grow there on which I could feed. My name is Love, Jeus. But you have called me. And with me came my little brothers the one of whom is called Strength, and the other Wisdom. Whosoever calls me can be sure that they will come, too. Build a little nest in your heart for us, Jeus, and feed us there, and we shall reside with you forever."

Later, as Jeus is standing in the room among all those busy people with their every-day talk, he feels that his little head is so empty. He has forgotten about the three little birds and what they have said to him. But suddenly a

wild desire springs up within him for the pigeons. He tears away from the hands that are holding him and runs upstairs. Daddy, however, is still faster, and Jeus is happy, in the end, as mother is sticking him into bed. Now he can think, think again of the silver grey sleek little bodies of the doves, of the Paradise of José, the broad path and the birds. Yes, the three birds, . . . they are sitting on a branch of the tree and are talking to him. They talk about . . . about . . . —and slowly knowledge comes onto him.

Many words are coming up in his mind, but few only remain in his memory, but these few seem to reflect in a simple form the substance of the talk of the birds to whom he had listened like a grown-up under the Paradise tree while his little body was lying asleep with open eyes in the pigeon coop.

He shall do his best. He shall learn to love the human beings and give to them, serve them with all his might. "But how?" thinks Jeus cautiously. "How, then?" Restlessly Jeus is turning from one side to the other in his bed. If only he could see those birds once more, they surely would tell him how. But for this he'd have to go back to the pigeon coop . . . And as he finally falls asleep, this desire is still within him.

It is about nine of the clock. Hendrik has still to do some writing. Then Crisje notices that the pen in his hand is idle. She knows very well what he has on his mind; her knitting, too, doesn't come off as it should.

Suddenly they hear a creaking noise on the stairs. Both are looking up: the doorknob is turning—and there stands their boy! His eyes are wide open, but he doesn't seem to see them at all. He is going straight for the door that leads to the stairs up to the pigeon coop.

"Cris, he's dreaming," says Long Hendrik in a whisper without knowing what he's saying. "He's a sleep walker. Now that, too! What's up again, now?" Jeus has opened the door. With two big steps Hendrik has reached him ready to stop him. But Crisje warns him quickly:

"Don't touch him, Hendrik, he may die of fright."

"Well, what else? Shall I let him go?"

"Yes, let him go."

On tiptoes they are following Jeus up the steps. Straightway the child is going to the pigeon coop where he is lying down right in the center.

Aghast, Long Hendrik is looking on over Crisje's shoulder.

But Jeus is waiting for his three little birds. He wants to learn more from them, but it is in vain. A soft voice, however, is whispering into his ear, and he thinks that it is the tall man, his friend, who is saying to him: "Not too much at a time, Jeus. First go and think over everything you have heard so far. Let yourself be put to bed and sleep well."

"Now you can pick him up, Hendrik."

"How do you know that, Cris?"

"I can't tell you, but I know."

Long Hendrik takes the child and carries him back to bed. Jeus falls into a deep, dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Is it true that you steal?”

ON FRIDAYS AROUND NOONTIME THE BEGGARS AND HOBOS of the whole neighborhood are converging on one point, the house of Mother Crisje. It is a sorry crew of cripples and half blind fellows, or just penniless individuals with stubbles on their chins, unwashed ears and hearts heavy with misfortune.

In this severe winter, especially, they welcome the hospitality of the house where they can get enough to eat, even a cup of coffee and a friendly smile to boot. While Mother Crisje is fixing their meals, they are sitting around telling each other all kinds of stories about their thoughts and experiences, their troubles and pains. Then they unbutton their shirt collars and compare the size of their fists, sunning themselves in the sorry little triumphs as to whose is bigger.

Jeus is sitting in mother's chair, watching the curious company. The fellows look at him, nod their heads at him and even joke with the little child. But then they have forgotten the little boy. The child is not afraid in this rough company, with frankness and open curiosity his eyes are following their every movement.

As Mother Crisje has given each one his plate, it becomes quiet in the room; everyone is now using his mouth to down the potatoes that have been dipped in fat.

In this silence suddenly the fine but clear voice of Jeus is heard:

"You must not steal any more."

They all are putting their spoons down and look at Jeus who is pointing his little finger at an old man right in front near the window.

Mother Crisje cannot utter a word. She has no doubts that Jeus' accusation is true. If Jan or Bernard had said anything like that, she would have given them a few quick slaps and put them outside. But now Jeus is saying it, Jeus who knows things in an unexplained way as she has seen by the strange experiences he has had already, as young as he is.

The old loafer has turned pale. With stooped shoulders he is staring down upon his plate, then throws a little glance at Crisje and back on his plate again.

"Is it true that you steal?" Mother Crisje is angry. "If that is so, you might as well go. I don't keep my house open for thieves, do you understand?"

The old loafer is ducking before these words as if they were so many blows. He is looking at the potatoes on his plate. Whether he is fearing for these potatoes, or whether he is really sorry,—nobody can tell this, although each one in the room has his own opinion about this. But the old fellow says: "Yes, Aunt Crisje, but I shan't do it again."

"God will bless you if you mean what you are saying. I can forgive a drunkard, but thieves,—no, they are jail birds, and suppose you die as a thief, what then?"

"Yes, Aunt Crisje," says he.

"How old are you, anyway?"

"Fifty-six, Aunt Crisje."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. The apples and the eggs which you brought me when I was sick, were they stolen, too?"

No answer.

"I should have known it. But, thank God, I gave them all away, it had to be so. You do that again, and you'll see what'll happen."

With a red face the man finishes his plate. Sullenly he draws the potatoes through the fat which has become cold in the meantime. What tough luck! How can that little monkey know everything?

All the other beggars feel uncomfortable now. They look furtively at the little boy and finish their meals faster than usually.

"Why don't you bring your dog?"

The new victim is looking into the smiling eyes of Jeus.

"Do you have a dog?" asks Crisje, glad that the tension has been eased somewhat.

"Yes, Aunt Crisje, and it's a pretty one, too."

"Bring him along next time, heh?"

The man is laughing all over his face. He is one of the loafers whom Jeus likes. When he laughs his whole face is laughing, and it always takes about a half hour before he can look serious again.

But the men are beginning to see that this child can look into their very souls, that no secret can be hidden from him.

"Have you been beaten up? Your wife is drinking like a drainpipe, do you know that?"

"Is that true?" Crisje is looking straight at the man.

"Yes, Aunt Crisje, I ran away."

"From your wife?"

"Yes."

"Was it that bad? Did she get the best of you? And now you won't go home any more?"

"I—I—eh—don't dare, eh—Aunt Crisje, she's carrying on with another man."

"Isn't that mean," Crisje is indignant. "That's bad, and that at your age . . . Can you pray?"

"No, Aunt Crisje, I've never learned that."

"But you must pray, man, if you don't pray you'll never go to heaven."

"How is it done, then?"

"You can do that just as you're talking with me now, see? Our Good Lord will hear you, no matter where you are, and the prayer that comes from your heart will always be answered. But I'll help you now to pray. Let's do it right away."

On the chest of drawers there stand the pictures of Christ, of Mary and Joseph. Mother Crisje is kneeling down before them. She is folding her hands and bowing her head.

As it remains quiet behind her she turns around.

The loafers don't feel very much at home in this situation. It is a long time since they knew how to pray. Some of them are hanging their heads, looking at the floor boards, while others are playing with their fingers.

"Well, this won't do," says Crisje. "You'll have to go down on your knees, that'll give more power to your prayers. And Our Good Lord, He wants it so. He had to go down on His knees, too, for us, and they even crucified Him, the numbskulls."

It takes a long time before all these men have bent their stiff knees. And then Crisje begins to pray for a little good

fortune for the man who hasn't accomplished anything yet in his whole life.

"Oh Dear God, You can do so much for us, You can give hope,—will You help this poor man? He cannot pray, he doesn't know how, but that isn't necessary, is it? He can just talk with You. You can understand all the languages of all the souls in all the world. Dear God, please make his wife change so that she stops running around with other men. Here, this man, that's the one who belongs to her.

"And he means well, Dear God, this man, he wants to do good now and avoid the evil. He's promising You to lead a better life, see? He is so grateful that You want to protect and guide him. I know that You will be pleased with this man, I know that You are not throwing pearls to the swine when You help him. He is repenting, he wants to work but he can't, he's epileptic. From this, too, You can free him, Dear God, hear our prayer. Amen."

"That was beautiful, Aunt Crisje," says one of the men as he is wiping his nose with the sleeve of his coat. It is wonderful what you may ask for in prayer. There isn't one man among the lot who is not inspired in some way by the beautiful spirit which lives in this house. They are now looking at the man for whom they had gone so unexpectedly into prayer and, to be sure, they are somewhat disappointed that he still looks exactly as before. After such a prayer they had expected at least a miracle to happen.

Mother Crisje feels free and easy within her heart. She's looking at her boy. Through him she has been able to help others.

Jeus can see right into the souls of others and thus he can help those that need help.

"This is how he's going to help all of mankind, when he grows up," thinks Crisje. She feels carried by the power which she cannot fathom, but in which she believes with the faith and intuition of a pure soul.

When the men have left Crisje sweeps the floor and tidies up the room so that everything is in order when Hendrik is coming home. Contentedly, she's humming a little tune.

And the following week only two loafers found their way back to Crisje's house.

CHAPTER NINE

The day is a sorcerer

A WAGON WITH MILK CANS IS RATTLING ON THE GRAVEL road. The heavy wheels are pressing down into the ground so that the pebbles are jumping this way and that and sometimes even hit the cans with a funny, bell-like sound.

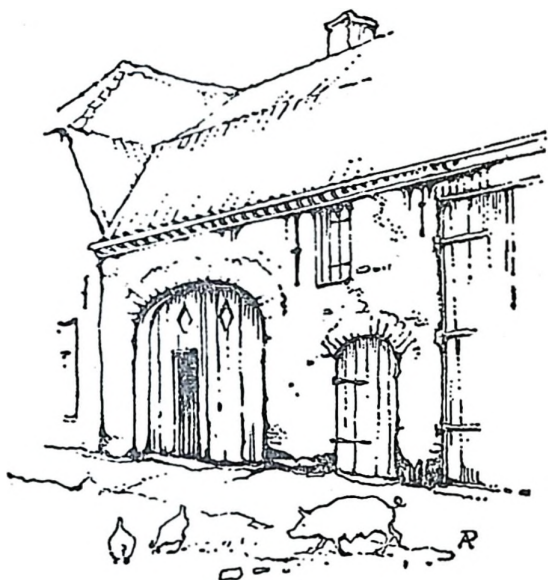
It makes Jeus wake up. Daylight is coming into the room. Outside, life is awakening, too. In the tree of farmer Hosman so many birds are singing that Hector the watchdog is waking up, and he begins to bark furiously. Jeus notices that Aunt Trui's rooster is the first one to crow in the whole neighborhood. "But tomorrow," thinks Jeus, "our rooster shall be first."

Now he hears Gerrit coming up the path. It must be half past five. Gerrit, farmer Hosman's hired man, is an early riser; when he walks, he whistles, and when he feels especially happy, he sings. And when he sings you can hear it in Emmerik,—at least that's what mother says. But Jeus is not sure about this. Today Gerrit is singing, the weather must be good, then.

Jeus is becoming restless. He kicks the blankets off and sits up in his bed.

Mother is up already, he has heard her in the kitchen. The window is open and Jeus can see a large piece of blue sky. Daddy is still asleep, Jeus can only see his head in the pillows. It is funny to look at daddy while he is asleep, and

daddy cannot even stop him, whether he likes it or not, and that is even funnier. Daddy who always looks so neat, well, he ought to see himself now! His moustache which always is so trim and straight is now all messed up, and so are his beard and the hair on his head. And when daddy is



breathing, his red lips become visible and Jeus has to laugh about this.

And as the sun is beginning to shine into the room, Jeus is feeling even happier. He pulls up his knees and folds his hands under his head. That's how he is greeting the new day.

What is this day going to bring him? Jeus likes to think about this. He is doing it almost every morning. Every day is a new wonder for Jeus, he realizes this when he is wel-

coming the new day in the morning and when he is thinking of it in the evening, his little head full of the memories of the things that have happened before the day was finished.

He likes the day, no matter how unaccountable it may be, and he is not afraid of it. It may bring him good things or bad, but always something new to think about. It makes him older, bigger and, most of all, wiser.

The day is for Jeus like the sorcerer in the fairy tales which Jan is reading in school. It takes Jeus by its hand as soon as he is stepping out of his little bed and leads him to ever new wonders. And every hour it is bringing new experiences for Jeus, yes, every minute.

Jeus is thinking of yesterday. What interesting, bad, beautiful, lucky, disgusting things have happened to him on that day! It all started in the morning.

He had been running a bit on the pebble path when suddenly he had seen a dead little bird lying on the ground. Speechless with sorrow he had knelt down by the side of the poor little animal. A wagon wheel must have gone over it for the little body was all crushed. Looking at the little spot with blood and feathers Jeus had cried bitterly. At last he had picked up the remains of the bird and brought it to mother who had put it into a paper bag. Then he had buried it in the garden. But before he had covered it up with earth he had said:

"I am going to ask José to let you come into his Paradise, there it is so beautiful and splendid, and there are no wagon wheels that roll over little birds."

Wasn't that a terrible adventure?

And then, as if to make up for this, the day had brought Arie to Jeus. He had almost bumped into Arie when he

was running up the gravel path. Arie was carrying a glass bowl with little fishes.

"How do you like my little fishes?" Arie had asked him. "I just caught them with this . . ." and he showed Jeus the small net which he was holding in his other hand. With big eyes Jeus had looked at the funny little fishes, how their silvery bodies were shooting through the water, and Arie had told him that he had many, many more at home. Thus Jeus had forgotten for a while about the dead little bird.

At noontime the baker had given him a ride on his wagon for a little stretch. Proudly he had been sitting there on the driver's seat, waving his hands at all the people in the street. Yes, the baker had even allowed him to hold the bridle and lead the horse. It was the biggest thing that had happened to him that day. His little heart had been beating with joy and, maybe also a little with fear. The strange, penetrating smell of the horse, its swaying back, the sweeping tail, the rows of houses that were passing by right and left, all these unheard-of things had brought the color into Jeus' cheeks.

And then suddenly it had begun to rain. Jeus had been sitting by the window and observing the raindrops which were pelting against the panes. With great interest he had observed how the raindrops were rolling together and then asunder again. He had asked mother about this and she had given him a very strange answer:

"That's because it's Carnival in hell, now."

"Carnival in hell?" he had said, unable to understand.

"Sure, if you look very carefully you can see the little devils dance." After this mother had gone back to her work, leaving him alone with all his questions. Hell?

What's that? And devils? What are they? And why should it be Carnival there now when it was raining here and the sun was shining at the same time? Jeus did not think that there was much to this, hell and devils and Carnival and all that. He had been looking out of the window for a long time, scared at every noise that had been coming from without, but he hadn't noticed anything strange. Wasn't this a strange and interesting thing, now?

"Hendrik, Hendrik, time to get up . . ." mother calls to dad from the kitchen where she is slicing bread for the family breakfast. At once he hears father rustle in his bed as he is stretching himself. Jeus, who has covered himself with the blankets again, is lying there now with closed eyes. He can tell by the noise what daddy is doing. He is putting on his socks, now. And now the trousers. And now he is going to the window.

"Good weather, already so early in the morning," Jeus hears his daddy say. Hardly out of bed, daddy is already in good spirits. He is whistling in the kitchen and then he does what he would never miss any morning: he kisses mother "good morning." It is a long kiss so that Crisje has to interrupt: "Watch out for the children, you dumbbell." But nevertheless she is returning his kiss eagerly.

Jeus can hear that mother is putting the plates on the table, and then the cups. And as soon as daddy will be ready, there will be breakfast. Daddy is sticking his head into the water for his morning wash. How gladly he would be with daddy and mommy at the breakfast table, thinks Jeus. Would daddy mind? Should he ask, or will that mean a slap from daddy? He decides to try: "Daddy, may I come in, I promise to be very quiet. It's so chummy to sit with you at the breakfast table. Please, daddy, may I?"

He hears his daddy laugh. Quickly he kicks the little blankets off. He knows already, he may come, daddy doesn't mind.

"Just listen to this, Crisje. Since when is he talking like Brugman?"

"He is talking so much in the last few days. And, funny, he understands everything."

"That's dangerous, Cris."

"Not yet, Hendrik. I can see when it is that far; then he'll have to sleep in the other room. But I like to keep him in our room for a while yet, it's because of the sleep walking."

"Oh, yes, Cris, that's true. I had forgotten about that."

But why doesn't daddy say that he may come into the kitchen? Was he mistaken in his hope? But then daddy suddenly calls:

"All right, Jeus, come, come in here to us."

Jeus is already there. Proudly he is coming into the kitchen. He suddenly feels as big and old as daddy. It is wonderful, to be alone with daddy and mommy so early in the morning while the others are still asleep. Mother is filling the cups, serving the bread. Then Jeus may sit on daddy's lap. Daddy's moustache and beard are already brushed, trim and neat. Jeus has to smile as he is thinking how his daddy had been looking only a short time before. But he is smart enough to say nothing about it.

It is a strange, a wonderful feeling to be so close to daddy. His daddy! Jeus is looking at him. Now and then their eyes meet and then daddy laughs and Jeus laughs back.

Jeus is looking at daddy's face, at his eyes, his ears, his nose, and also at his teeth which are grinding the bread

and he is proud of all this. And because daddy has such long legs, that's why he can sing so beautifully that the whole world is listening to him, but daddy is not going away, he thinks too much of mommy and his little brothers and—of himself, Jeus, too. And daddy is wearing shoes, not wooden clogs, not only on Sundays but all week long. And he can curse, too, his daddy can, of course not as the sons of Mrs. de Man, but he does it like thunder, anyway, with a loud voice. But what makes Jeus most proud of all is the way daddy can kiss mommy. He is going to see that now.

Daddy is finished with his breakfast and Jeus has to come down from his lap. Mommy fills the cups once more and then she takes Jeus' place on daddy's lap. Daddy lays his long arm around her waist and pulls her close to him. That's how they are taking their coffee together every morning. Jeus knows that already. But the best is yet to come, Jeus is waiting for just that.

Daddy is ready. He has to leave now, but first he goes and looks at the sleeping children. Carefully he lifts the little cover under which Gerrit is sleeping and then he comes back into the kitchen. Now that he has to leave earlier he cannot have breakfast with his children together. Thus the boys are missing their daily admonishment, but they don't mind that . . .

"Well, Cris, I'm going now."

Crisje is waiting. "Will you be careful?" But he doesn't hear. He grabs her with both hands around the waist and—whoops—up goes mommy in the air. After twenty kisses or so he lets her down, at last. Jeus thinks that this is the nicest moment of the whole morning.

Summer or winter, this room is always bright and sunny

for there is always sunshine and brightness in the hearts of mommy and daddy.

As daddy has left, Jeus says: "How daddy can kiss, eh, mommy?"

"What a little rascal," thinks Crisje, but she has to laugh. "You better watch your step, Jeus, or daddy won't let you get up again, if he hears that."

"Dammit, I shouldn't have said that," thinks Jeus. Mother gives him another slice of bread and then she begins to clean up the room.

"I have cursed, in my thought I've said dammit" Jeus is thinking all of a sudden.

"Mother, may I ask you something?"

"Yes, go ahead."

"Why do people say dammit?"

Mother Crisje gives a start. Quickly she turns around.

"Why, Jeus, that's a bad word and you must never say that again or you'll go straight to hell."

Hell. There it is again, hell.

"To hell, mother? What's that?"

It is half past six in the morning and Crisje has to explain to her little boy what hell is.

"Hell,—now that is—that's a place where all bad children go, it's just like the cellar."

"As dark as the cellar?" Jeus wants to know.

"Yes, as dark as the cellar."

"And why do people say—damnation?"

Crisje is now really stumped. "Did you learn all that yesterday?"

"No, mother, I knew that for a long time."

"That's a bad cussword, too."

"Oh, I understand, now."

But Crisje is afraid that he knows even more bad words, therefore she says quickly: "Stop it now, Jeus. Here, bring this little can back to Aunt Trui and don't forget to thank her for it. But say it in two words."

"Yes, Mother."

Aw, what a sad spirit there is in Aunt Trui's house. The couple are sitting opposite each other, eating with long faces. They have nothing to say to one another. Gradus is reading an old newspaper and Trui looks out of the window, bored, and drums on the table with two fingers. It seems to Jeus that the very air in that house is bad and he is glad as he is standing outside again, breathing the pure and fresh morning wind.

"I'm going to be like daddy," thinks the child, "and not like Aunt Trui. She never laughs and never says anything to Uncle Gradus."

And suddenly he begins to run out of pure happiness that comes from the sun, from the birds and the green trees and the kisses that daddy gave to mommy this morning, from the day that is still before him, from life, the precious life which is foaming within him. And he cries: "Yippee—yippee!"

Jeus' little world consisted of the garden and part of the gravel path. The treasures which he found there were sufficient to keep his mind busy for a long time. But now that he can make larger steps he is beginning to long for the world that is beyond the limits which his mother has set for him. The little fellow whose spirit can go on trips as far as a bird can fly, this sensitive little boy has a soul that is longing for space irresistibly.

But today there are still all kinds of things in store for Jeus.

As Jeus asks his mother if he may go out for a little walk with Bernard, she says "yes," but not without having cautioned him at least ten times to be careful. Full of joy about the coming adventure, Jeus promises that he will be careful enough while Bernard is only nodding his head,—he thinks that it isn't worth the trouble because he is a big boy, now . . .

Holding each other's hands the children are leaving. Jeus is running with a skip and a hop; it is the excitement that he should see now for the first time the world which has been unknown to him so far.

"That's Hosman's farm," says Bernard, pointing with his right hand. But Jeus is not even looking. "I know," says he curtly. He has been playing already several times with Anny Hosman, the little girl who was born only a few days after him. He knows the barn and the stables as well as Gerrit the hired man himself. Gerrit had also told him the names of the horses. And he has been lying for hours in Hosman's pasture in the grass looking at the dreamy cows; yes, he had even given each one a name although the big animals did not listen to them.

On Bernard's forehead there appears a wrinkle. He had expected admiration and respectful attention from little Jeus and what does he get? Jeus says only "I know" when he should say: "Oh, yes, how wonderful." Therefore he is saying to Jeus now:

"So, you know, eh? But you haven't yet seen the hut of Sint van Tien, heh? Have you?"

"The hut of Sint van Tien? What's that?"

"That's better," thinks Bernard. Putting on an important air, he answers:

"What that is? I'll tell you that right away."

They are selecting the black dirt road. "This road goes all the way to Montferland," Bernard throws in.

To the right and left of this road there are high, steep trees. The children are now entering the woods where they are received by a great silence, a silence that is so deep that even their voices are absorbed in it.

Jeus thinks that he can recognize the Paradise which he had seen when his soul had traveled away into space, where he had gone with José. He would much prefer now to obey the call of the trees all around which are whispering to him: "Stay here, Jeus, sit down in the moss and listen to the stories which the forest has to tell you."

But Jeus feels that he has to go on, that he cannot leave Bernard now. His little brother would certainly not care to stay and lie in the grass here. Bernard cannot hear the voices of the trees because he would not have the patience to make himself as one with the life that is growing here, and working and breathing. . . .

His answer to the tree-voices is: "Soon,—next time . . ." and he is making himself free from the influence of the forest. Then he is asking Bernard hundreds of questions.

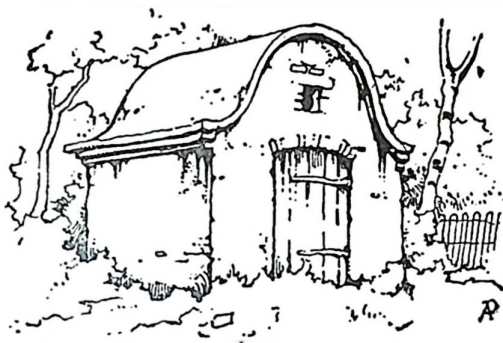
"Look now, Jeus, there's the hut of Sint van Tien," says Bernard in a mysterious way. They are standing now before a small hut that is half in ruins and has a small hedge all around it.

Bernard is whispering now: "There's a man buried here who has hanged himself. That's what the people say."

"Hanged himself? What's that?"

"That's when somebody goes and puts a rope around his neck and hangs himself that way because he wants to be dead fast."

"Shouldn't he do that, then?"



"No."

"But why do they call it the hut of Sint van Tien?"

"That I don't know, and there's nobody who does,—nobody."

"But why did they bury him then here?"

"Mother said that people who have hanged themselves may not be buried together with others."

"Why can't they be buried with the others? Are they bad, then?"

Bernard is angry that he cannot answer this question and he tries to drag Jeus away. But Jeus isn't quite ready yet. For a long time he is looking at the little hut. Then he asks:

"Why have they locked this hut, then? And why the hedge around it? And there is a lock on the gate, too. Are they afraid that the hut might run away?"

But Bernard has already gone. Jeus shrugs his shoulders and runs after his brother. There are a lot of things again for him to think over.

JEWISH CEMETERY.

"And this is the cemetery for the Jews."

"Cemetery for the Jews? What's that?"

"You should have asked me 'what's a Jew?' see . . . but you are still too young to think." Bernard is saying this to get even with Jeus who has asked him questions which he could not answer.



Jeus feels like snapping back: "What, I cannot think?" but he swallows his words. But as soon as he'll see José again and his friend the "long man" he'll ask them

whether Bernard is right. And if it should be true he'll ask them how he can learn to think.

"Come, let's go to the mill, it's nice there, too."

It is the first time in his life that Jeus sees a wind mill; it is standing on a hillock and its large wings creak as they are turning in the wind. Everywhere Jeus wants to stop for hours and there's no end to his questions so that Bernard doesn't know which ones to answer first.

The children are now walking on the road that leads to the "Wetering." This is a small body of water and it glitters in the sun like polished silver. The shine is so strong that it hurts their eyes.

"And there, on the other side of the water, that's Germany, see, and the Germans are different people; they speak just like Peter. Daddy can speak German, and mommy, too."

"Can one learn that?"

"Sure, but it takes a long time."

Now they are going back on the road again. A butterfly is careening around their heads. They try to catch it but it is too fleet.

"Down this way," says Bernard, "there's the Plantation. There it is very pretty, too; and here's the guard house. The guards have to look out for the drunkards."

"The drunkards?"

"Yes, when they're drunk, the guards take them along."

"Mrs. de Man, too?"

"No, she knows better, she stays home. She doesn't get drunk in a barroom. But the guards have to watch for thieves, too. Look, Jeus, there's a guard, right there. They always come down this way, on horseback, and they have

long swords. With the swords they beat the drunkards. And if you don't want to do what they tell you, then they lock you up and then your father or mother has to come and get you, to take you home.—Do you want to see the school now, Jeus?"

"Where's the school, Bernard?"

"Right there in front of you, that big building there to the left of the street car," says Bernard as he is walking up to the important place with his little brother. They're standing before the gate. "That's the place where the children play. That's the building where Jan is now, and soon we'll have to go there too. It's where we are learning our 'rithmetic and writing, and also how to speak. And Jan says that there are six classes here and when you have been through these, then you'll go to work with daddy in Emmerik. They have to sing, Jeus, can you hear them? And others have to recite all the things they've learned for the teacher."

"Those teachers, are they good people?" Jeus wants to know.

"Jan says Miss Wessem is pretty catty. She comes from far away, they say she's a stranger here."

"Do they punish you, Bernard?"

"Now and then. They make you stand in the corner, and if you don't stop being bad you have to go into the coal bin, says Jan."

Jeus has heard enough about this unfriendly place. He wants to go further.

"Where do you want to go first now, Jeus,—want to go through the little alley, or to uncle Gerrit? Or shall we walk through the town? I know already," he answers his

own question; "we'll go through Kelder Street and then we'll see the church."

"Everything," Jeus thinks, "is wonderful. What a great many things there are to be seen in this world."

"Look, Jeus, this is the Café Ernst; that's where the football players are coming together, see, and that there is Marine's Jaspes. When you're big you can go there and rent a bicycle. I know, when I'll be big, I'll go and rent a bicycle here too. It only costs a dime, see. He has plenty of bicycles."

"How does that go then, Bernard?"

"All by itself. You can use the bicycle a whole time, but when the time is up you have to bring the bicycle back."

"But if you break it, what then?" asks Jeus who is practical-minded.

"Then you have to pay for it."

"But how, if you haven't got a penny?"

Jeus is convinced that Bernard would ruin the bicycle. But Bernard only shrugs his shoulders.

"Look here, Jeus, this is where Zwaab lives. He's a butcher; he kills only goats. And then here lives Anny Klarendaal. All the butchers live around here. Do you still want to see the church."

"Sure, I'd like to. Is that where mother is always going to pray?"

"Of course."

They're walking down Kelder Street, then Bernard turns off to the left and there stands the church, great and big and beautiful. Jeus is astonished.

"My God, Bernard, what a big house."

"You're crazy, that's not a house, that's a church. A house is different."

"But do they have to build such a big house just to pray in?"

"Of course,—don't you know that maybe a thousand people can go into that church?"

"Is that so much, then, Bernard, a thousand?"

"Aw, if you had a thousand marbles you could play marbles for the rest of your life. And if you'd lose always, in every game, you'd still have enough. That's how much a thousand is." Bernard is very eloquent, the comparison is good, and Jeus nods his head.

"And what are all these people doing in the church, then?"

"Pray, nothing but pray. I told you that already. You just ask mom. She knows everything."

Filled with respect Jeus is looking up to the high tower which seems to reach almost into the clouds. What this is for he cannot possibly make out. Jeus points up to the tower and asks:

"Are people sitting up there, too?"

"I think so."

"Have you been in church already?"

"Yes, with mother. But you ought to see that, that's something. It's better than looking at it from the outside." Then Bernard pulls Jeus away from the church.

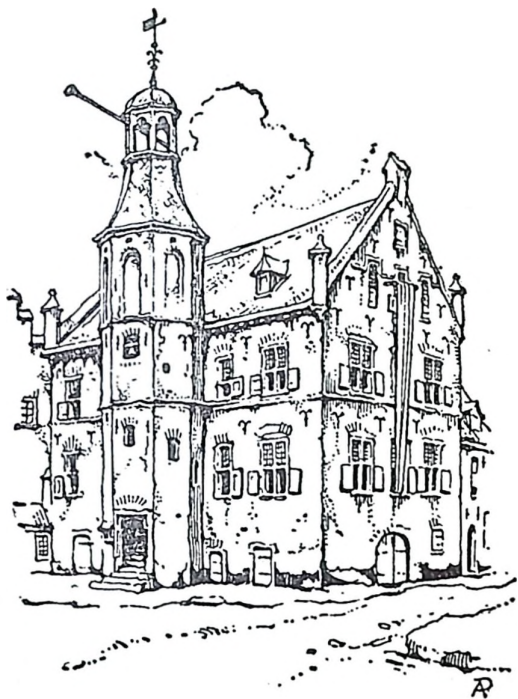
"If you keep on walking straight ahead here you'll come to Watershap, that's where the old castle is in which the baron lives. And here in this beautiful old building, there is the burgomaster." With a sweeping gesture little Bernard is pointing at the city hall.

"Does he live there, too?" asks Jeus.

"No, not here. He lives in the Boetzelaerburg right behind the Café Ernst."

"Well, what is he doing then here in this big house if he isn't living here?" Jeus wants to know.

"At home he lives for himself, and here, he sits for other people."



But Jeus isn't yet entirely satisfied. Bashfully, afraid of Bernard's snappy remarks, he asks:

"Is he only allowed to sit here, then?"

And promptly Bernard lets go: "Of course not, dumb-bell, don't be so silly,—he can stand up, too, if he wants to."

swer this question. She says: "No, that's there to honor Our Dear Lord, see?"

"Why do you have to pray there?"

"Because that's where Our Dear Lord is."

"Isn't Our Dear Lord anywhere else?" Jeus is really making it hard for Mother Crisje. But she has an answer for everything:

"Our Dear Lord is everywhere, see? But in church He is all the time. You can pray better in church than outside or anywhere else."

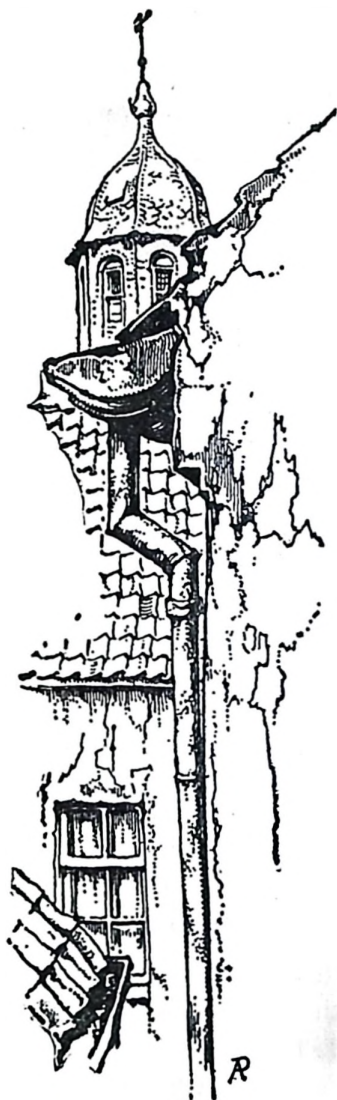
"Will you take me to church, mom?"

"Yes, but you'll have to wait a while until you'll be a little older."

At last Jeus has enough. His little head is full of all the new things which he has seen today. In the afternoon he thinks all this over once more until he's ready to go to sleep:

"And now: Your supper and then to bed. . . ."

Crisje is kissing him "good night" and covers him care-



fully with his blanket. Once more he tries to think, but he is just running with Bernard to the hut of Sint van Tien when slumber is overtaking him.

CHAPTER TEN

“Shall we be friends, Deut?”

THE TWO BOYS ARE INSEPARABLE THESE DAYS. EVERY morning they are going out together. This gives Jeus an opportunity to become familiar with the neighborhood. Mother Crisje is happy that they are getting along together so nicely. “Just leave them to themselves,” she thinks, “it is good for Jeus. It is surely better for him than to sit around and look into space.”

Jeus enjoys all this in full measure. His friend the long man, José and the other children are strangely absent, now. They are giving him time to learn about his own world.

On his wanderings with Bernard Jeus doesn't miss anything. Every minute new things are unfolded before his eyes.

Today Bernard has no mind of going very far; he'll bring Jeus to Deut Messing.

Deut Messing! The simpleton! How many times hasn't Jeus heard about him! His daddy and mommy, Aunt Trui, Gerrit Noesthede, Red Mina and Bernard, they all have been talking about Deut Messing at one time or other.

Bernard and Jeus are walking through Dassen Street, and suddenly they are standing before Deut. Jeus' steps falter, —with great, astonished eyes he is looking at the weak-minded man who is sitting on a tremendous stone on the

corner of a building. Deut is a giant; his broad, strong shoulders are carrying a large head. His eyebrows are big and bushy and the hair of his head is red. He has a stubble beard. His eyes are pale, it is as if they were covered with a veil, just like his soul that is slumbering somewhere in his great body. You only have to look at these eyes and you know why they call him the simpleton. He is forty years old but has the mind of a child of two.

And what he likes best is to play with children. Of grown-ups he is actually afraid, the mere looks of them is scaring him. Then he is like a helpless child because he feels how big and old and wise they are. He shrinks away from them as they come near him and when sometimes someone is giving him a cigar he grabs it quickly and hides it in order to smoke it later with much pleasure.

But the children are his friends. Whenever he is sitting on his stone there are always a few around him. And so it is today, too.

Bernard is pulling Jeus towards the circle of children and says to the simpleton:

"Deut, I'll give you a penny next Sunday if you will just play a little with Jeus. Tickle him once, Deut."

The simpleton is coming to life. First he wipes his wet nose with his big hand and then he grabs the unwary child and starts to tickle him. Jeus goes into the funniest contortions in order to escape these big, raw hands, and he makes the queerest faces so that all the other children are going wild with laughter, until at last he contrives to free himself through some lightning-quick movements. But the children want more of this and they are picking now on a little tot who is hardly old enough to walk. But happily for the little thing there is an older girl among

them who has more sense than the others. She pulls the little one away:

"Deut would squeeze her to death, you numskulls," she cries and then to the child: "Where do you belong?"

"It's Annie Knies!" cry some of the children. "You know old Jan Knies who lives down there a little ways beyond the pump. Don't you know, she's a sister of Matthie and Willem and Hendrik and Gerrit Knies, the boys who play football?"

Now she knows. She has to go down that way anyway, so she'll take the little child along and bring her home. The poor little thing is now crying.

The bigger girl belongs to the Hosman's. There are many Hosmans around here, there's baker Hosman, farmer Hosman, then the grocer, too, to mention a few. They belong to the middle class and that's why the children are more or less jealous at the girl. What business has she with Deut, their Deut! The halfwit belongs to them, doesn't he? One of them says:

"Deut won't kittle anyone to death, he isn't as crazy as that. . . ." No, Deut isn't crazy, except when his nose dribbles and when he is sitting there staring in front of him while he blubbers and his saliva is running . . . When Deut is like that, he usually has been at odds with his father and then the children know better than to fool around with him.

But now Duumke* is coming and that's something new again. Duumke is Deut's best friend; they understand each other without saying a single word.

It's a strange thing about Duumke. Eighteen years he is old, but he is not taller than a boy of ten. And he's as lean

* Duumke, low Dutch for "little thumb."

as a fence rail, and that's no wonder; the poor fellow is carrying a tapeworm inside, a tapeworm that must have at least ten heads. This monster is never asleep, it is always ready to take all the food which Duumke is devouring in unbelievable quantities, and Duumke gets almost no nourishment from it. And the monster is growing and growing while Duumke is becoming leaner every day.

The worst is that he cannot even speak with anybody about his suffering, the people only laugh at him and vex him unceasingly. Thus he comes to Deut. The big simpleton does not laugh at him, no, he even is sympathetic and says "yes, yes."

Now Deut and Duumke are inseparable. All the little things that are given to them here and there they are sharing like brothers, yes, they even break a cigar in two between them.

But today it seems that the tapeworm with its ravenous appetite has even swallowed up some of Duumke's good qualities. With a freshly lit cigar planted in his mousy face at a rakish angle the little fellow is coming to his big friend.

Deut stops playing with the children. He is licking his lips in the expectation of a few puffs on the cigar which, he hopes, Duumke will let him have. Duumke sits down next to Deut who is moving over readily to make room for his friend.

And Duumke smokes and doesn't say a word. He acts as if Deut were so much air. And Deut can feel it and cannot understand it, and he sees also that the cigar is getting smaller all the time. Isn't he going to get a few puffs, at least? He is looking at Duumke and says:

"Do I get nothing?"

Can't Duumke even answer him any more? He is now blowing a puff of smoke into Deut's face. That's too much for Deut. The aroma of the cigar makes him suddenly act; with one swoop he has grabbed the cigar from Duumke's mouth: "I have to have something, too," he explains.

The children seem to enjoy it tremendously. They think that something is going to happen now, that Duumke couldn't let that go.

"You should've told me that sooner," cries Jeus, "that's really good."

"Sure," says Bernard, "but it doesn't happen every day that these two are fighting. Often he has the devil in him, then he lets the spittle run out of his mouth, just like dogs do sometimes, and that can last a long time. I bet that Duumke is rid of his cigar."

But Bernard is wrong this time. Just as Deut is ready to take his first puff, Duumke's lean little hand shoots out and he has his cigar back. That's too much for the simpleton. The tears are coming into his eyes. Deut is crying.

"That's really bad now, darnit, Jeus. Now he's going to cry all day long and nobody can make him stop."

In Jeus' little head a solution is taking form:

"Shall I go home and ask mother for a cent to buy him a new cigar?"

But it isn't necessary any more.

Anton Klink who has been standing at a distance, has seen everything and treats Deut to a cigar.

"Many thanks, many thanks." Deut's tears are drying fast as he is blowing the blue smoke into the air. Deut enjoys his smoke and it is delightful to watch him.

"He smokes better than daddy," says Jeus with admiration. "Just look how he can smoke, Bernard, he can even

smoke through his nose, dammit, I should've known that sooner."

Bernard is getting impatient. Angrily he says:

"Sooner? Why don't you hold your mouth. You couldn't even walk, then. Or would you have crawled to Deut on your hands and knees? You think you know everything, but we know something too, see?"

Jeus does not have to think long, he knows very well what Bernard has in mind. He replies snappily:

"So, now you keep to your own bragging-world and I keep to mine."

"Bragging-world? Bragging-world?" stutters Bernard confused. He has never heard such a word before. But Jeus doesn't hear him any more. He wants to be alone. "What is that I have said here again, now? Bragging-world!"

What this word really means Jeus doesn't know himself. It's something for Bernard to think about. And Jeus thinks that he has been using some pretty bad words to-day; he has said dammit, too. But the big people are saying even worse things. But it shouldn't be, if you say those things the devil may come and take you right straight down to hell, "where it is as dark as in the cellar," he knows. Mommy has told him so.

And soon Jeus' thoughts are back again with Bernard and the other children and with Deut and Duumke who seem to have a special attraction for him. With Deut and Duumke the tables have turned now. Duumke who has been holding on to his cigar to the last quarter inch, had finally been forced to throw the butt away and now it is Deut's turn to blow the smoke into Duumke's face. Jeus who is observing the two fellows feels that it will not be long now before Duumke will ask Deut for a puff on the

cigar. He can read their thoughts. And true enough, there is the thin boy asking already:

"Deut, let me smoke on your cigar some, will you?"

And Deut shows here what a good fellow he is. Duumke's mean act of a few minutes ago is already forgotten. But Duumke must not mind, now, that Deut is keeping the cigar in his hand while he lets his little friend puff, he just wants to be careful, that's all. And thus the cigar is being smoked mutually to the last inch.

A strange feeling is coming over Jeus. Is it the heat that has made Duumke fall asleep now sitting on the stone? He feels now sleepy, too, and he goes to the fence that is around the garden of Mrs. Peters. There he lies down in the grass.

And slowly, while his eyes are still resting on Deut and the sleeping Duumke it becomes quiet around him. He knows this calm, this silence. It is the same calm which is around him when he is traveling to the "long man," to José and the little children, the same silence in which their world is living. He has experienced it also in mother's garden when he was lying among the heads of red cabbage where he had been thinking over all the new experiences of the last few days.

But now it begins to boil and bubble within him, his little forehead is full of wrinkles and he can feel that his eyes are becoming bigger and bigger. He knows that he is now in that condition where he can think and feel and see as deeply as he wants to. And he is older now, too. Maybe as old as José, he thinks.

His eyes haven't left Deut for a moment. "Deut" says Jeus to himself, "Deut, Deut." How nice it sounds. "Deut

Messing. Messing, this name belongs to Deut. Wageman,—that belongs to Jeus. It wouldn't go with Deut. Wouldn't sound right. How wise Our Dear Lord is. He knows exactly what names the people should have. And the animals, they have names, too, and these names are just right for them. Why, thinks Jeus, what I haven't learned today! That's because I'm thinking so much. The people say that Deut is crazy, simpleminded. Is it true? Jeus' soul is now directing itself towards the simpleton who is immersing gradually in its depth.

"How quiet you are, Deut. You cannot think, can you? You're like a child even younger than I am. And yet, you're so big, Deut. Just wake up for once, Deut. Can you hear me? Listen towards me, I understand you, I have you already, I see you already. And you, you know me . . ."

Jeus is talking to Deut. Does the simpleton hear him? The people do not hear Jeus talking. They can only see a child that is lying in the sun, his hands under his head. What do they know about his communication with the childlike spirit of that giant there on the stone? They wouldn't even believe it. Anything like that has never been around here. How can you then believe it when it actually happens?

— Suddenly the simpleton seems animated. He has finished his cigar; he has to get something new now. Jeus can sense this desire within the giant. "This fellow isn't crazy at all, only he cannot think higher than that," and Jeus brings his hand to his stomach. "But he has to think here, with his head. But he can't. His mind isn't working the way it should. His mind hasn't the fire, for Deut himself hasn't been born yet. His body, yes, that's already forty years old or more. And now he cannot think all his life, not like a

grown-up person. Listen, Deut, shall we be friends? Come to me and tell me something, Deut . . .”

The children that are hanging around Deut look surprised all of a sudden, as their friend, without a word, is getting up and goes to little Jeus Wageman. Jeus had not even called him, the children notice.

“That’s fine, Deut, that you have listened to me. Now that’s something, see?”

The giant is lying down in the grass near the child. A little hand grabs his big fist without fear. There’s still not much expression in those water-blue eyes, but around the big mouth there is something like a smile. And the child says: “Shall we be good friends, Deut, you and I?” and the giant answers with a grunt: “Yes, that’s good, Jeus.”

The friendship that is closed here between the child and the giant is unbreakable. He may be simple, and he may be crazy, but friendship means something to Deut. And does he know how to choose his friends! It seems that he can look right through the children or people that come near him. He will have nothing to do with low and mean characters.

The children are jealous of Jeus. Deut protects his friends, and woe to him who do any harm to a friend of Deut. Then the giant will get him and tickle him until he is almost dead.

Bernard knows this, and that’s why it is not very smart of him that, out of pure jealousy, he makes ugly faces at Jeus and calls out: “Look at Jeus, ha, you ought to see that, ha, ha.”

Deut is getting up and that is already enough for Bernard; he runs as fast as he can. As he is far enough to be safe he turns around and cries to his little brother:

"Wait, you mean little cuss, I'll get even with you. To sick Deut on me, would you? You do that again and I'll tell everybody that you can walk with closed eyes and that you eat pears in heaven, and that you don't like this boasting-world, and then you'll whistle a different tune, you."

But Jeus has heard him well. He has his answer ready: "Go ahead and tell, I like it, I like it, see? What do you say, Deut?"

And Deut says "yes."

Jeus is holding his own pretty well in his quibble with Bernard until suddenly Long Hendrik is popping up and says: "What are you doing here? Move on, Jeus, and go home." He doesn't like it that Jeus is lying on the ground with Deut.

"Daddy," begins Jeus, "Deut isn't crazy . . ."

"Not crazy, heh? How do you know that?"

"I know it, daddy."

"I think you should have different playmates. Crazy or not,—you can't trust him."

Jeus has to stand still for a moment, his daddy's words cause him actual pain. Then he runs up to daddy again:

"Yes, you can trust him, you can, daddy. He's doing nothing bad and he's my friend."

Long Hendrik has to laugh.

"Now just listen to that! Good heavens, what you don't know already! You sure have learned to know people, heh?"

Big Long Hendrik is still laughing as they are entering the house. Mother Crisje is looking surprised: "What makes you so happy, Hendrik?"

But he takes his time. He has to kiss her first. Then he says:

"I had to come here with a shipment of wine and I hurried a bit so that I would be home early. Now we have a nice, long evening for ourselves. And the treat is on me, I got a little 'extra.' "

Mother Crisje doesn't think much of these "extras." Could it be that Hendrik has been thinking again that his boss has too much wine in his cellar?

"For whom was that wine?" she asks Hendrik.

"For the baron, Crisje. He drinks only the best. And he gave me a good tip, too. When I came, he said: 'Ah, here's Long Hendrik.' Well, he had to pay for this, see?"

He only permits his best friends to call him "Long Hendrik."

"I hope that you didn't snitch any wine, Hendrik?"

"No, not that, Crisje. But when I was standing in his cellar, so, and he was right next to me, I say to him, 'That'll taste good, baron, I say, that's a wine, even I could drink that, eh, . . . all day long I'm working with this stuff but never a drop goes over my lips, baron. Well, Cris, I bet you can't guess what he said to that?'"

"Well, what did he say, then?"

"He said: Well, you should go and study, then you can drink as much wine as you want, Hendrik. Well, there I was standing, looking at him. What does he know about my singing, heh? I say to him, No, I say, I sing only for my Crisje. And, as I was talking with him that way, I could see that he was interested in my voice. So I started to sing for him. I let him hear one aria after another.

"Believe me, Crisje, everybody came to listen. At the end he says to me: Long Hendrik, you should take up voice study. It's a pity that not more people can enjoy listening to this. I told him what I had already said before.

"But then he says: Here, Hendrik, that's for your Crisje. Dammit, I think, so he knows my Crisje too, eh? But that's of course because of Father Reenen. Well, here 'tis."

And Long Hendrik takes a bottle of the finest wine out of his pocket.

"That's a good one, Crisje. Comes from my boss, see, only barons and counts are drinking it. We couldn't buy that kind, it's not for our pocketbook. But our stomachs will like it, I'm sure."

The good wine helps to make it a wonderful evening for the whole family. Of other evenings the children would be in bed already, but tonight they may stay up a bit longer. They are all sitting around the table as daddy pours the wine. The children are getting a little wine, too, and, although a shot of water is added, they are under the impression that it is the real thing, the first time in their lives. Daddy's serious face has something to do with it too.

"And now, Crisje, let's drink to our own health and fortune, that we may get some more boys with good heads and good voices. But I won't leave you, Crisje, not for anything. You don't have to worry about that. I'm not going to study, Crisje, as true as I am Long Hendrik, no matter what they may say. I belong to you and the children, and I have always made a living, haven't I?"

They drink. The children are looking at daddy to see how he is doing it, then they imitate him, swinging their glasses in the same manner, and they even gargle as he does before they down the precious liquid.

What an evening! Daddy is taking his violin out of its case and the children are thinking: "Is there anybody in the whole world who can play like him?" Little Jeus has a strange sensation; it is as if the notes that daddy is creating

with his bow on the fiddle were dancing hand in hand right into his little head and knock there at the door of the little room where Jeus' memories are locked. And what thoughts aren't suddenly coming into Jeus' head as daddy is playing! He is lying in Mother's garden looking up into the sky where the clouds are sailing against the blue heights. And these clouds come in all kinds of shapes. Now they are formed like sheep, Jeus can easily see their heads and feet, but then their bodies become longer and longer and the sheep are disappearing. What next now? Oh. Jeus is standing near the hut of Sint van Tien. He is shaking the little gate. "Why did they lock you up?" He has hanged himself, this man. But why? Mother is going to have another baby, thinks Jeus. And he knows that it will be soon. His little heart is warming up at the very thought, and in this feeling of warmth he has to think of Deut. Deut Messing! He knows the simpleton now already inside and out, and he wants to be good to him, always. Yes, Deut can have anything from Jeus. And he will do the thinking for him too, for the giant who is only a little child. Daddy's music brings calm and happiness. It makes you feel mild. Jeus is thinking of his quibble with Bernard, he places his little hand on that of Bernard and Bernard winks at him and smiles.

The longer he plays, the more pleasure Long Hendrik is having. Then he puts down his fiddle and begins to sing. And as daddy is singing, oh delight! mother is singing too.

Daddy's eyes are shining now, he is harmonizing his voice with that of mother. "Even the angels can't sing like that," thinks Jeus. If his little friends could hear that!

And that's the end of a perfect evening.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

*“For we human beings can only
learn through suffering . . .”*

JAN DERKSEN IS CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM AS HE leaves his house. He is an old man. Now he stands still. His head is sunk deep between his two shoulders. He is trembling, but it could not possibly be from the cold; the sun is shining warm and so bright that Jan is squinting his eyes. But there are moments when the strongest and most patient man is trembling under the blows which life is dealing him. Jan Derksen may close the door behind him, but the misery that is living in his house doesn't know closed doors, it is following him with every step.

Was there ever a time for him that there was no misery? That he could laugh and not feel the terrible pain from a wound that seems never to heal? Jan cannot remember such a time. And were there ever nights when he could lie down to sleep without that fear of tomorrow, the tomorrow that was sure to come with ever the same sorrows? No, this tired, worried man knows that there never were such nights.

The world goes on as if it were not concerned with the suffering of this man whose steps are so tired and slow and faltering. The world is singing and blooming and sparkling in sweetness and light. Or is all this beauty around him to cheer him up, to encourage him?

Jan Derksen lifts his eyes and sees the world and he can feel a little sunshine come into his soul. Has he always known nothing but troubles and worries? And it suddenly comes to him that there was a time when he could laugh with a happy heart.

Jan Derksen thinks back to the years of his youth. It wasn't easy then. Early already he had to help earn the daily bread for the family. He had to work hard and long for a few cents; but some day all this was to change, some day he would make his fortune and he would be happy for the rest of his life. He knew this for sure, with a certainty that is only known to youth. And it came. Minny brought it to him, in the splendor of her young mouth, of her voice and her blonde hair.

Minny, yes, he loved her from the first day that he saw her and he could not rest until she had learned to love him, too. In those days happiness had been with him wherever he went, in his days and in his nights and his dreams until the day when she married him. But then his luck had deserted him as if it had been jealous of so much happiness.

Why are you now discouraged again, Jan? The animals, the flowers, the farmer in the fields, the grass and the trees,—they all are looking up, praising the light of the sun in which they glory!

Two days after their marriage Minny became sick, Jan remembers, two days, and after that she has hardly ever left the bed. Her youth, her strength, her cheer,—they all have left her while she has been lying there between her sheets. Once in a while when she was feeling a little better so that she could get up and look after the household she

seemed to be the happy Minny again as of old, then her cheeks showed a little red and her mouth a little laugh, and the love which they felt for each other broke out with all the fire so long suppressed. And now Jan is thinking of the terrible tension which he had felt when the hour of delivery came. Her body, weakened through all this sickness, would it be able to stand the strain of childbirth? Eight times he had gone through this, eight times Minny had borne a child. And now she is but the shadow of her former self, maybe she would never be able to leave the bed any more, now. All that is left now between them is their love and that is a good thing; it helps them bear their hard lot.

What kind of a life is this? All by himself he has to keep house, wash and iron and cook during the time that his hands are not busy to earn the necessary money for the large family. Money to feed ten mouths, to clothe ten bodies, money for the rent and much money for the sickness, for nourishing extras which Minny needs so badly. And then,—what may be going on in the mind of the woman who has to look on helplessly from her bed . . . ?

As Jan is coming to the house of Mother Crisje he suddenly remembers what he went out for.

Crisje is lying on her bed. "Hello, Cris, are you sick?"

"Lo, Jan. No, not sick. We're just expecting another one. How's everything at home?"

"That's what I came here for, Crisje. Maybe you can help me. Minny is so sick again. So much pain in her intestines."

"In the intestines? I know that, my mother had that so much. Wild-currant juice, that's the best thing for that.

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It's much better than all those expensive medicines from the doctor. These make it only worse, it's bad for the intestines to take those medicines."

"Thank God, we still have some of that, I can give her that right away. And do you know what to do for this, Crisje: Kathy has something on her thumb, see. She can hardly stand the pain. It's just as if she were tortured all the time. It is eating her whole thumb away."

"I know that too, Jan. I've had that myself. That's something in the blood. There's only one remedy for that, it's maybe not very nice but she mustn't mind: tell her to go to Hosman's and get some fresh cow manure. That's what I used myself, and in two weeks it was all healed up. If she doesn't do that, Jan, the whole thumb may be eaten away, and what she'd have to suffer, I wouldn't wish that to my worst enemy."

"Thank you so much, Cris. If I can do something for you, some day, let me know. Will you do that?"

Jan remains standing beside the bed. He cannot make up his mind to leave. A man wants to talk, sometimes. Crisje can see that, she knows the conditions in his home and can understand what's going on in his head. She asks him to stay a while. "All right, then, a little . . ." says he.

It does not take much to start him talking. Jan Derksen is unloading his heart, the words are coming all by themselves. They ease the tension, the worry that is making his heart so heavy.

What he is telling her is even worse than Crisje had imagined. It is really too much for him. He is going down on his knees, burying his face in his hands and begins to cry wildly, without restraint, and the tears are coming, the tears that have been held back in all these years forcibly.

It is bitter to see a man crying. A man? Crisje is stroking his head soothingly; he is a child looking for protection from the great, hostile, unaccountable life.

"Will there ever be an end to this? And why do I have to suffer everything? There are so many people who suffer nothing at all . . ."

In this hour all these questions—and doubts—are coming up, but Crisje knows at once what she has to say, the words are coming to her without thinking, bright and rich like the rays of the sun that are shining into her room.

"Don't doubt, don't quarrel, Jan. There will be an end to it, and this end will be a new beginning at the same time. Then you'll have to give answer to Our Good Lord. Up there you'll know if you've done on Earth what you should. Then you'll know if you've learned from this life here, or if it has been all for nothing. And, Jan, what you've learned here you will take with you wherever you may go there. Nobody can take that away from you, nobody.

"Why some people have to suffer more than others, I don't know that, Jan, only God knows that. But I believe that we must be glad that He has given us a heavy load to carry for only through suffering can we learn to love everything that He has created."

Thus they are talking together, Crisje and Jan, and as he is going home later, he can whistle again and sing with the birds.

In the evening as Hendrik has come home and they are going to bed she tells him of Jan's visit and how she has been able to cheer him up. And Long Hendrik wants to know how she has been able to find the right words to speak with Jan.

"Well," says she to Hendrik, "what shall I tell you? There's so much about which I have been thinking lately. It's Jeus who really has taught me to think. I have learned from him that we human beings do not think enough in our lives. Life is passing by and we don't get much out of it. Most people grow up and die and really haven't lived at all. They live together, speak to each other and yet don't know each other because they don't think, Hendrik. And when other people come to them with questions they have no answers and have to let them go away again as empty as they came.

"'Is there ever an end to this misery?'—'Why do I have to suffer so much when others are so well off?'—Aren't these the questions that most people ask, Hendrik? I myself have been asking these questions so often until I've learned to think. And now I know also that I cannot help Jan altogether. I can cheer him up, I can give him new strength, yes, but help? No. That I cannot do. That's what I've been thinking today as I was lying there with my own worries."

And then Mother Crisje is telling Hendrik why she was not able to help Jan altogether. Father Reenen could not say it better in his sermons, thinks Hendrik as he listens to Crisje telling him how the human being, when it comes to that, has to face his problems alone, the worries, fears, sorrows which come to all of us in our lives. And Long Hendrik can only nod his head and agree. "Life is teaching us all and nobody is spared. Everybody gets his share and has to realize that we are standing all alone, that we have to stand alone to learn our lesson from life. In that hour not even God can help us. No, not even God; He is not trying us through such sufferings in order to take them

from us again with our first tears! How could we then learn and improve our characters and our souls? Yes, we may pray to him for strength, but we have to stand the test, go through it all alone, not for His sake, no, only for our own sake."

"Yes," says Hendrik. "Yes." And a little later after he has thought about it a while he asks: "But why should you have worries, Cris?"

"Because of the children. It's because I'm to be a mother again. In that condition we women feel things which only women can feel. You men cannot feel this. If you want to know, I'll tell you.

"You remember, Hendrik, how I felt when I was expecting Bernard: I had such a longing, I wanted to say everything and I was busy and rushing around. With Jeus I was different again, always thinking, dreaming, and there was such great happiness within me, there was such a great silence within me that I could truly hear his voice—unborn. I could see things which you could not see and nobody else. This calm and the things which I saw were from another world. And Jeus can look into that, and I think that it is the real heaven what he is seeing. He is going to do big things yet in his life, believe you me, Hendrik. He hasn't received that power of feeling for nothing. Jeus looks at things differently than we.

"With Gerrit I was different again. He kicked and pushed in my body. No, there was no calm, no silence there, and I was not happy, then, either. And now this one who is coming now, who is going to have your name, Hendrik, he's not like you, you'll see, but . . ."

"But what, Cris?"

"Well, I don't know it, Hendrik."

Hendrik puts his arm around her and kisses her. . . . You're tired, Cris, you have to sleep . . ."

"Yes, I think that's what it is. Let's go to sleep now, Hendrik."

But Crisje cannot sleep now. Long Hendrik has been sleeping already quite some time but she's still awake. Mother Crisje is thinking of her children. Again she is thinking how it was with each one before he was born. Jan who had made her so drowsy has become a drowsy boy who is without the force and willpower to wake up his mind. "He's going to have it tough in life. And this wild, reckless Bernard, is life going to tame him some day? Jeus, too, shall have it tough, she knows, but different from Jan. Jeus, too, is quiet, but that is because he lives and thinks deeply. She will have to teach him in the proper way how to live and understand, treat him just in the right manner, otherwise it will kill him, thinks Mother Crisje. Gerrit will cause her a lot of trouble, he has a difficult, closed character. And Hendrik who is to be born now? Again she feels a heavy woe in her soul, she wants to cry from the child within her. Thus each child has created different feelings within her.

It is her fear for the future of her children that is keeping her awake. These lives have been entrusted to her by God and she suddenly feels all this responsibility. Five different characters are demanding her love and her guidance. . . .

"... I shall do my best, but it won't be easy, see?"

CHAPTER TWELVE

Manus shows what he can do for two cents and Gerrit speaks Italian

GERRIT NOESTHEDE,—HE IS SOME FUNNY FELLOW. WELL, I can't say much, even if you ask me. More things happen to him in one day than to others in a whole week. In almost every story that he tells he is the hero. Yes, it seems that nothing ever happens in the little town without Gerrit. When he comes to visit the Wagemans you cannot take Jeus away from him. No wonder,—Gerrit only talks about things that people like to hear. Only the other day he has been telling a tall story again about Manus Reuzel who can make you well by stroking with his thumb. And Jeus had inquired where this wonderful man lives, so this morning he went to see for himself. But what he saw there made him forget altogether about the "stroking." It was for the first time in his life that Jeus saw a smith at work. The fire, the red-hot iron and the smith hammering it so that the sparks were flying all around, the hissing sound when he pressed the iron on the hoof of the horse and the nails that he could drive in without the horse crying "ouch"—boy-oh-boy was that mighty. And that man could also "stroke"? Gerrit must be right, that was a miracle-man. Only when his empty stomach reminded him that dinner was more than overdue, Jeus at last found his way home. He ran to the house, there to tell everybody about

the smith, the fire and the horse and the horseshoes. "I'll have that done to my clogs, too. Then they'll last forever."

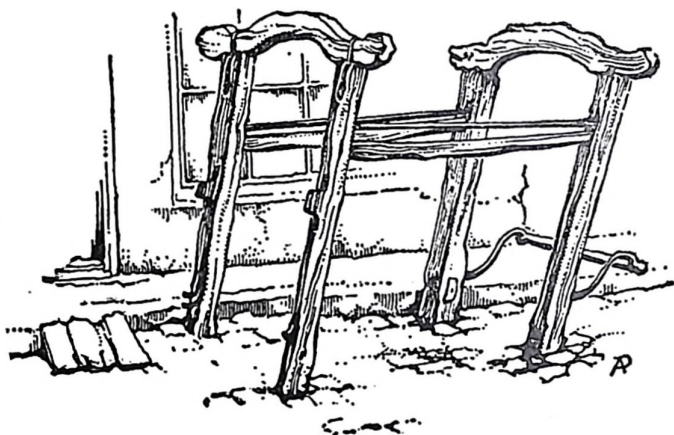
It is noontime now. With his thoughts Jeus is still with the smith.

"Bernard, how does he do that stroking?"

"With his thumb. Have you got a toothache?"

"No. But can't I just say I have?"

Bernard has to laugh. He thinks that's a good trick.



"But that costs money. He won't do it for nothing. Five cents, that's what it costs. But he may do it for two cents, maybe. We have to see that we get some pennies."

The two boys are running to Aunt Trui and with the sweetest faces they ask if they may run some errands. And then, richer by two cents, they are going to Manus.

"Good thing that she gave us that money," says Jeus with satisfaction.

"Good thing for her," says Bernard cold-bloodedly. "If

she hadn't, I would have gone and plucked her chickens."

Manus is at work. Already from far they can hear the hammering and the clanking of the iron. The sparks are flying high.

"Listen now to what I am telling you. We may not go into the work shop. For the stroking we have to ring the bell in the rear, see? There hangs a bell. If you pull it, Manus will come out. But first you have to put the cloth around your face so that he sees that you have pain."

Bernard ties his little brother's head up with a towel which only a short while ago has been hanging on Mother Crisje's washline. Jeus makes a face as if he had pain. Then they ring the bell and presently the short smith is standing in the door. His face is as black as the leather apron on which he is wiping his sooty hands. It is a sorry pair on which he is looking down. His face drawn in pain, Jeus is looking at the smith and Bernard stands next to him and he looks as if he were ready to burst out crying out of pity for his little brother.

"My little brother has a toothache, Manus," says Bernard.

"Will you help me?" asks Jeus with a halting voice.

"Is it that bad, my boy?" The black man feels sympathy and pats the child's head tenderly.

"Yes, Manus," lies Bernard. "He's been crying all week, and now I've brought him here."

"All right, go and sit down there, my boy, and let me have a look." Manus takes the cloth off. "Now open your mouth."

Jeus opens his mouth wide and Manus looks in.

"Yes, it's bad, pretty bad. How could you stand it all

this time? Why did you wait so long?" Manus is shaking his head. "But I see what I can do, heh? Have any money with you?"

"Two cents, Manus, that's all we have," Bernard informs him.

"Did your mother send you?"

"Yes, Manus, but mother has no more, either, see? If you will please do it for that?"

"Well, it isn't very much. But this time I'll do it for that, because you have so much pain, my boy." Then he looks at Jeus and says:

"Can you pray?"

"A little, Manus."

"Then you have to pray what you can. I'll pray, too. Now close your eyes, hear?"

Jeus throws one more glance at the big black hands that are coming close to his mouth now, and he begins to feel uncomfortable. Then he closes his eyes. Manus' thumb is feeling for the painful spot. There he makes a few little crosses on the cheek while he is mumbling the Lord's Prayer. Then he says: "The pain's gone now, heh?"

During this solemn ceremony Jeus began to perspire.

"Yes, Manus, it's gone, the pain's gone," says he with faked enthusiasm.

"Now you still have to pray the Lord's Prayer three times. If the pain should come back again, I'll have to stroke you again. But then it'll cost you five cents, understand?"

"Yes, Manus." Swinging the cloth like a white flag the children are running away while Manus is going to Hent's saloon to restore his strength with a drink of whiskey. It was a miraculous act of healing.

Bernard cannot stop laughing. Every few steps he has to stand still and slap his brother on the back with pleasure.



But Jeus is becoming quieter by the minute. Suddenly he bursts out:

"I didn't have any toothache but now I have one, and it started when Manus made little crosses on my cheek . . ."

* * *

How many surprises old man winter has for Jeus! Also in these days Bernard is his inseparable friend who can teach him and show him so many wonderful things. He shows him how to make yards and yards of ice-strips to slide on and how to slide squatting on his haunches. Together they make a snowman: the eyes are pieces of coal, the nose and mouth little sticks. And they take daddy's pipe when mother is not looking and put it into the snowman's mouth, and on his head they put an old hat. They make snowballs and Bernard demonstrates how to throw them at the passers-by so that a white spot on a man's back

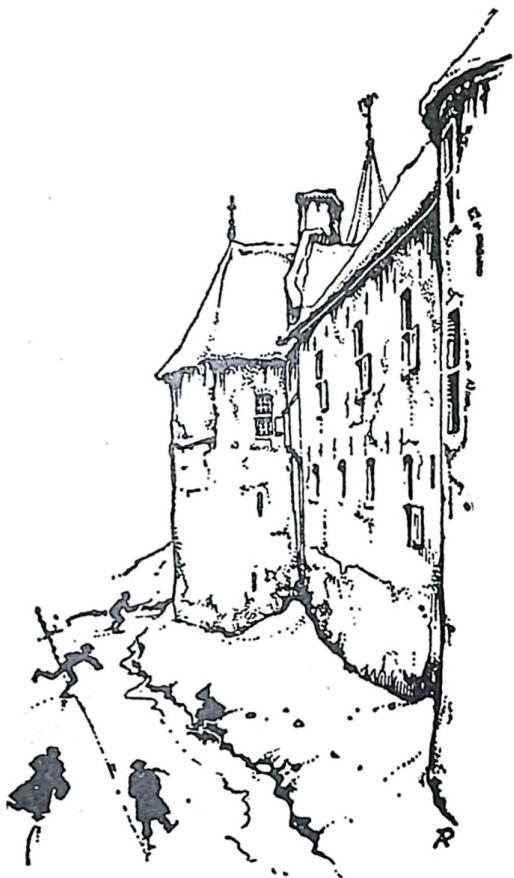
will show a hit. And when the man gets angry and turns around he cannot find out who it was that threw the snowball. But the most interesting thing, they find, is to go and try the new ice on the pond, whether it is strong enough. Is it because this is so dangerous? What a breathtaking adventure, to run over the ice that is still so thin, to hear it creak under your quick steps.

Bernard brings Jeus also to the castle of the baron. There the ice-skaters are flitting on the frozen moat. Jeus cannot see enough of the frolicking crowd at the foot of the old walls. He wants to know if ice-skating is hard to learn. You can learn that by yourself, says Ben and Jeus plans to ask his mother for a pair of skates.

But the greatest surprise of this winter is the arrival of Carlo and Chang. They are two slate-roofers, directly from Italy. They have a few months of work here and have taken room and board with Aunt Trui and Uncle Gradus. Proud of this distinction of having something special in her house Aunt Trui introduces her boarders to Crisje and Long Hendrik. For her it was a way of getting rid of the two black-haired fellows because they are spending their free time from now on in the merry home of Long Hendrik.

That first evening they came, what an unforgettable experience! At the greeting the children had to line up: One, two, three, four, five, Jan, Bernard, Jeus, Gerrit and then Hendrik, who had to be held in his back by mother because he was still so young that he could hardly stand by himself.

"Well?" Hendrik had said proudly. "And you ought to hear them sing." Long Hendrik could not talk enough about the good qualities of his boys who were listening to



all this with astonished eyes. "And this is mother." With a laugh Hendrik lifted Crisje up who tried to prevent him. "There isn't such a girl in all of Italy." The greatest worry had been that they might not be able to understand the language of their visitors, but now they found that they could speak to each other very nicely.

"Tomorrow night I'll ask Gerrit to come; he can talk Italian as I 'Hollandsch.' He has been in Florence, and even further. With him, you can talk," promised Hendrik. Then he had sung for his guests and later he had taken out his violin. Yes, there his visitors had seen and heard something.

Carlo, a big, quiet bear, was sitting there smoking his little pipe and saying nothing. He only nodded his head in admiration. But the vivacious, quick Chang was itching to get the violin into his hands himself. Then he played and it was as if sparks were flying from the strings: popular tunes, melodies from operas, he could play everything, and together with Long Hendrik he entertained them all for hours. The three oldest children were allowed to stay up to the last, something that had never happened before.

Hendrik goes and tells Gerrit. "Tonight there are Italians in my house, that's something, with black curls. You must come and talk with them, heh?"

"Yes?" says Gerrit, not quite as enthusiastic as Hendrik had expected.

"Man, they're real Italians, and they are glad that they can talk Italian with you."

"Yes?" says Gerrit again slowly, and now he looks almost worried. "But I have to go away tonight, I . . ."

"Well, if it can't be tonight then make it tomorrow night. They'll come then too."

"Tomorrow night? Yes. . . ." But Gerrit's face remains worried.

"Can't you make it tomorrow, either?" says Hendrik in surprise.

"Yes, but look,—I don't feel so good these days . . ."

Well, to make a long story short, he finally agrees to

come tonight. And he actually comes. The room is full of people and everybody is looking at him in expectation. Hendrik steps up to him, an Italian at each hand. They squeeze Gerrit's hands hard and cordially and everybody is speaking at the same time. Then it is suddenly quiet in the room. Now Gerrit Noesthede is to say something, the snappy Gerrit who has traveled far and wide and who can talk Italian so well. And Gerrit says:

"Good evening, everybody."

Maybe the otherwise so bold Gerrit Noesthede is a little confused by all this. But once they'll all sit down and are at ease, then he surely will make those Italians sit up and listen when he'll show them how well he can speak their language. And that's what Gerrit is doing: Suddenly he says: "Si,—si."

The crowd is breathless. Why, that's the purest and clearest Italian that he's talking there! With renewed impetus the Italians pepper him with their quick-fire Italian—exclamations—questions,—but the only answer they are getting is: "Si, si,—si, si."

Slowly it begins to dawn on everybody that Gerrit's vocabulary is not larger than that of the cuckoo.

"I've forgotten my Italian, fellows, it's so long ago that I was in Florence."

He may have forgotten his Italian, but he surely has been in Florence. They can't take that away from him, and that's something,—what peasant of Gelderland has ever been in Florence? Well,—his triumph is not to be of long duration.

Yes, the Italian guests know Florence, too. How he likes Florence, they're asking him now in broken Dutch. "Wonderful," says Gerrit, of course.

What was it he had liked the best there? Gerrit tries to think, it seems hours before he finds an answer, he pretends to remember all those many objects of interest he has enjoyed there to find the one he liked best, and then he says: "The Museum."

But—which museum? they are asking him; isn't almost every house in Florence a museum?

"Too bad," says Gerrit, "I don't remember which one."

Does he know the Teatro Verdi?

The what?

The Teatro Verdi?

Oh, does he know it, he's been there many times . . .

What was that name again of the famous railroad station, remember, Gerrit? Gerrit thinks so hard that he moans. "Sante," says Carlo,—“Sante,” says Gerrit and stops. "Sante Maria Novella," Chang remembers suddenly. And Gerrit remembers too, of a sudden.

But then the Via Appia. What a street, heh? What a pleasure to walk on it. World famous, this street. The Via Appia,—Gerrit goes into ecstasy as he hears that name. Yes, hundreds of times he has walked on that road, says he. And then the Italians burst into a loud laughter and slap Gerrit on his back as if he had been telling the greatest joke. And poor Gerrit, he can hardly laugh with them, he doesn't know what it is all about, . . . but as he finally is told, he suddenly remembers that he still has to go somewhere. The merry fellows with the black curls, however, force him to sit down again: "Just admit it now, Gerrit, that you have never been in Florence,—the Via Appia in Florence—no, Gerrit, it isn't in Florence at all, it is in Rome . . . !"

The crowd is laughing, but Gerrit is sad; they all know now that he hasn't even been in Italy.

But now Chang takes the violin while Long Hendrik is filling the glasses, and then the temperamental Southerner draws the most beautiful melodies from the brown wood. And Carlo, too, is coming alive now; with quick, youthful steps he approaches Crisje and soon he is swinging her around in a merry dance. Everybody joins in while the children are running between the dancing couples. Chang is standing on a chair now, beating time to the music like the conductor in a concert: And this goes on until everybody sinks down in his chair gasping for breath.

"Per bacco," cries Chang, raising his glass. "Per bacco," cries Carlo likewise. And as Gerrit, too, is calling "per bacco," all the others are taking up the call: per bacco, per bacco!

On other evenings it is quieter. Then Chang and Carlo are talking of their beautiful country. And in their tales there is a fire, a glowing warmth, in contrast with the ice-cold weather that they have been having now for months.

They like the Wageman children. They take Bernard along to their work on the tower and that's something for the little rough-neck. "Let him go with us, we'll make a good slate roofer of him." Chang likes to be with Jeus. They talk together as well as they can and Jeus wants to know more about the country that is so far away and where the sun is always shining. Chang has had a boy just like Jeus, but he had died early. Would Crisje let him have her Jeus? He'll make him rich.

No, says Crisje, not this one, not for all the money in the world. Chang can see that those "Ollanders" don't sell

their children. And shortly before Jeus' birthday the Italians are going back to their own country,—without Jeus.

And hardly a month later Crisje receives two baskets from Italy, filled with bottles of Asti Spumanti, a beautiful remembrance of the two visitors. "Per bacco," they are saying to each other, father and mother and Gerrit. And Long Hendrik likes to rub it in: Gerrit, says he, now I can talk Italian just as you. Then he empties his glass with the golden liquid.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

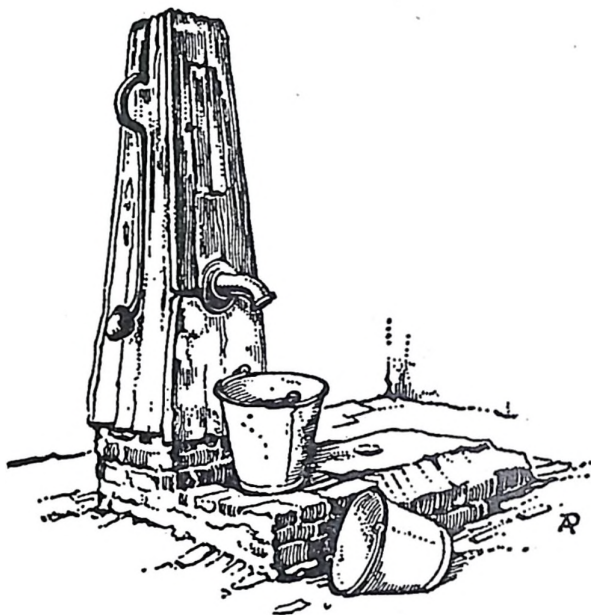
The simpleton is blubbering

DEUT THE SIMPLETON HAS BEEN SITTING ON HIS STONE now for two days and two nights. Motionless he is staring, with his head in his hands while his snivel and spittle are running freely. The people say: he's blubbering, and they turn their heads away in disgust; that's all they do. "Nobody can help that halfwit, anyway," they're saying to justify themselves in their own eyes. Even the children know better now than to come near Deut. In this state he's dangerous. Duumke, too, is staying away, he remembers the blow which he has received once from the blubbering Deut. Luckily for him, some bystanders were able to rescue him that time from the furious giant, otherwise he might be dead now.

It is becoming quieter and quieter around Deut. Night is falling and all the noises of the day cease. Darkness is beginning to crawl over the earth.

What is going on in Deut's mind? One can only guess it. Even a halfwit can hide his thoughts. The whole town knows that it is the fault of his father again. As usual, Deut had been bringing him whose legs are paralyzed, home from the fields on a wheelbarrow. When the cart had become temporarily stuck in a rut the old man had cursed and grabbed the cudgel which was lying next to him. With this he had beaten the simpleton mercilessly and Deut had taken it without moving, without batting an

eyelash. He could have knocked the old man down with one blow of his fist, but he did not do it. Why not? The people of the little town could never make that out. Was it because Deut would not raise his hand against his father? Or what was it that made him powerless against



this crippled old man? No, Deut would not beat the old man, but he would do something else. With a jolt he took the cart up again and, without making an outcry he rode the old man to the edge of the gravel road. There he tipped the cart and dumped him down the incline so that he rolled into the potato field at the bottom like a barrel from a beer wagon. Two men who had witnessed the incident from the distance came a-running and brought the old man up again. They told Deut to calm down and

brought him so far that he rode his father all the way home. But there the old man who was foaming from his mouth now with fury, took revenge on his simple-minded son. He beat him again where he could hit him which was not difficult since Deut again did not move. But this infuriated old man Messing only more and he hit his son with the raw end of the cudgel right across the face. At last the simpleton began to move. Was it that this blow hurt him so much that he suddenly came to consciousness? It had never yet happened that Deut had been driven to self-defense.

Deut's muscles became taut, his arm bent backwards, then his fist shot out and the blow fell; it knocked the old man right down.

It is now two days later and old man Messing is sitting again at his window with his tobacco pipe. But Deut is now blubbering and he will not move from his stone. Deut's mind has gone back to sleep again. Daylight is coming up in the east. Gradually the noises are coming back. Horse drawn wagons are creaking and rattling by and the drivers are cracking their whips and as they are passing Deut on his stone they call out to him "good morning," but the simpleton is not even looking up. Later they try to coax him away with a piece of liverwurst and a glass of beer, but Deut would not even look at a cigar which has been offered to him, and in his eyes there is so much fury that nobody dares to come near him.

Red Mina is telling Mother Crisje what has happened with Deut as she is going to the pump for water. "And it's a good thing that it isn't so cold any more, or he might've frozen to death, poor fellow," she's concluding her story.

Jeus who is playing in the garden hears the story. He

knows enough; with Vanny his dog he runs down to the Dassen Lane. There sits poor Deut. But Jeus doesn't run straight to his friend. He looks at him first for a long time and he can feel that his eyes are getting bigger and bigger. Now he knows how to act with the simpleton; he steps forward and approaches Deut. There is a certainty within him that makes him feel calm so that he is almost smiling as the other children are calling out to him: "Leave him alone, Jeus, he'll kill you."

Deut suddenly feels a firm grip around his hands. A trembling goes through his big body. His lips draw up in an ugly way and his hands are forming into fists, large and square. The children see it with fear and their hearts are beginning to beat fast: something is going to happen now . . . they want to call for help. But then Jeus begins to speak; slowly Deut's fists are opening up.

"Deut, just listen to me, I'm your friend Jeus." The child is stroking the hairy hand of the giant. Vanny looks at his little master and then he sniffs at the big wooden clogs on Deut's feet.

"Deut, don't be like that; forget about the old man. Go home, Deut, you can't stay here on this stone. All those snotnoses will laugh at you and make fun of you." With his handkerchief he wipes the slime from Deut's pants and jacket. Then he continues:

"Deut, don't you know me yet? Look at me, it's Jeus. Just look at them there, the gossips. Now they're afraid of you, don't want you because they think that you'll wring their necks. But you wouldn't do that, I know, what?"

Jeus keeps on stroking Deut's hands, but his eyes are following every movement of the simpleton who is busy

cleaning up his spittle. Jeus feels clearly that he has to try to bring Deut back to reality. He says:

"Look, Deut, over there is Stinky Dinny, she smells so and that's how she got her name. And she's got lice, too. They sleep six in one bed, that must be some odor. And there's Pieter van der Kolk, he lives over the hill, says Bernard, and they live on stolen oats. Work? No, they won't do that, Deut, they're too lazy for that. And this one there who is always pestering you so, that's Graatje van Dien Wet-a-pants. He can gossip like his mother, they both are tattle-tales, Deut."

The simpleton is listening, Jeus knows it, although his head is still way down between his shoulders. He's listening. What is listening, his head? Why, he has no brains; his long, threadbare jacket, or his corduroy pants that are much too short for him, or his clogs, are they listening? Anyway, with renewed courage Jeus goes on:

"Well, there's Matthie, too, you know him well enough, a brother of Willem and Hendrik and Gerrit Knies. And look there is the cock-eyed one, too, true enough, you know, the boy of Dien the drunkard. He steals everything he can lay his hands on. Twice already the guards have locked him up. His father drinks like a gutter. To Teet Egging they cannot go any more, he wouldn't sell them anything on the cuff, and at Bennad's they owe already, too. They have been thrown out there."

The simpleton is lifting his head, so that Jeus can look into his eyes.

"Look at me, Deut. No, not this way,—hold your head up, see?" He tries to lift the heavy head with his little hands but Deut makes himself free and lets his head sag.

back between his shoulders. The pressure that is on his soul is not so easily to be shaken off.

"If you keep on like that, Deut, I'll go home again. And then I won't give you nothing any more, see? Come, Deut, go with me home to my mother, you'll be much better then, you'll see. Then they cannot laugh at you any more. Look, Deut, Vanny is also here. And look what I have,—a beautiful marble. Why, isn't that pretty? Do you want it? I'll give it to you if you'll go with me to mother. Just look at those snotnoses, they want to make fun of you, there they are standing around like a bunch of lummoxes, but Our Good Lord will take care of them. Oh, look, Deut," and Jeus is lifting Deut's head up again. And Deut is crying, the tears are running down his cheeks in little streams.

The children are beginning to cheer now. "Now he'll soon be all right again," they are crying. "When he's crying, then it won't be long any more before he'll be better." But their screaming and laughing sounds evil. "Keep at it, Jeus." And suddenly Deut's tears stop. He looks around then he falls back again into his inhuman loneliness where the sounds of this world are not heard and the light of the sun is not seen. And there Deut's spirit has been living, for days now, without aim nor purpose. And it is endless, for there is no end to a road without a goal. But then suddenly he has heard a noise, the tolling of a silver bell: the voice of his little friend. And Deut's spirit begins to move again, following the sound that is calling him back to the world, at least as far as this is possible for the poor, weak mind. . . .

And Jeus is keeping it up; he is talking unceasingly:

"Look, Deut, there's Jan the Cry-baby, he cries day and night. He can scream louder than our pigs. He's much

older than I, but he still wets. Isn't that something?" And Deut is looking; a short moment only, but he did it . . . Jeus quickly follows up:

"This one, there, that's Tienieke Kolemander. Bernard says that they curse there worse than Mrs. de Man. And stealing doves, they can do that, too. And at Mrs. Aanse's house they have torn down and broken the grape-vine and she thought at first that Bernard had done it, but Bernard was innocent, and our Jan, he doesn't steal, he may be a numskull but he wouldn't do that. Come now, Deut, and don't be scared when they laugh and scream, what?" Jeus is warning the simpleton and he pulls at his jacket so that the giant is getting up and following his little friend.

"You just let them scream, Deut, we're going to mother and then you'll get that marble."

The children around are crying hurrah and some of the grown-ups join in as Jeus is coming hand in hand with the simpleton around the corner towards Aunt Crisje's house. "Deut isn't blubbing any more" it goes from mouth to mouth.

Mother Crisje understands immediately what Jeus has done.

"That's nice of you, nobody has been able to do that yet, do you know that?" says she, and then to Deut:

"So, Deut, you're a little better now, heh? Forget about the old man, Our Dear Lord will take care of him. Go with Jeus and look at the pigeons."

Jeus takes him to the attic where the pigeons are and the big man follows willingly.

"You have to see what beautiful pigeons we have, Deut. Here they can fly right out through this hole, and they always come back, see? And we don't have to feed them,

either, they find their own food. And when they fly away, they go as high as the heavens. Do you want to hold a young one in your hand?"

And now the simpleton is speaking for the first time:
"Yes, Jeus."

The child places a young pigeon into Deut's great hand.

"How warm it is, isn't it a beautiful little animal? Wouldn't you want to be a pigeon, too, Deut? Then the old man can't beat you any more." But immediately Jeus feels that he shouldn't have said this. Full of fear he sees the wrinkles return on Deut's face and quickly he says:

"This one is just two weeks old, Deut. When he is three weeks, he can fly. Want to hold another one?"

Deut is holding a young pigeon in each hand. He is looking at them and then he says suddenly:

"Where is that beautiful marble?"

Jeus is happy to see that Deut's mind is again on human things. He takes the shining marble and puts it into Deut's pocket.

"Come Deut, lets go first to the little rabbits. And the little piggies, they're pretty, too." They stay a long time with the rabbits.

"Look, Deut, the long ears this one has. Jan says that he is ready for mating but I'm not sure what that is, hm."

Jeus is bringing his big friend home. He sees him disappear in the black opening of his door. Then he waits a few minutes, but he can't hear anything, everything seems to be all right, therefore he runs back on Dassen Lane and home. He is more dancing than walking.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Golgotha

A FEW MORE WEEKS AND THERE WILL BE PASSIONTIME. Nature will then be clad in her gayest and sun and rain are helping her by making the grass grow green, the flowers in beautiful colors and the trees and bushes in those tender hues that come with springtime.

Every day now for several hours Mother Crisje is working in her garden and the little potato-patch. Only once in a while she has to look after the two youngest boys, Gerrit and Hendrik, who are growing like two heads of cabbage, with the only difference that you don't have to run after cabbage heads while you never know where those boys are and what they are doing. Crisje wouldn't let them play in the garden because they would cause too much damage among the vegetables. Now they are playing indoors on the floor with their wooden railroad train, and Crisje is lifting her head once in a while to listen if they're doing any mischief, or she is running inside to see that they don't get at things which they shouldn't touch.

More than ever before she is lately together with Jeus who helps her outside and inside, as little as he is, for he is very clever and quick to learn. In these hours she is talking a lot with the little fellow and he asks her questions which quite often she cannot answer. Does that child ever do anything else but think? Sometimes when playing he will interrupt the game when it is most interesting and run

to her with a question which is puzzling him. At the same time he is the most popular playmate with the other children and always the first in everything.

Today Crisje finds that she cannot keep her thoughts on her work. What is it that has come over Jeus again in these last few days? And then what he said this very morning!

This morning he got up together with daddy. He ate his sandwich without saying a word. Then he looked at daddy for a long time so that Long Hendrik was almost annoyed and said:

"Why are you looking at me so, Jeus?"

And to their consternation he answered:

"Because we're going to have a girl now, daddy."

For some time Hendrik said nothing. Then he remarked:

"These are things of which you don't have to think yet, Jeus. We're getting that from Our Dear Lord, mother and I, and you mustn't think about this yet, understand?"

And quietly Jeus had answered: "Yes, daddy, I won't say it again."

Thoroughly surprised and not quite sure of himself, Hendrik said later to Crisje:

"Has any child ever told you anything like this? I really did not know what to say to this, Crisje."

Jeus subsequently took his chair to the window and that's where he's still sitting now.

Is he sick and doesn't he want to tell them in order not to worry them? Has he any troubles? Crisje can't make it out, she'll go and talk to him again, maybe she'll find out this way. She drops her work in the garden and goes inside. No, says he, he's not sick. Has he any troubles? He shrugs

his shoulders and looks out of the window as if he were not aware of her presence.

"It is just as if he were carrying the worries of the whole world on his shoulders," thinks Crisje. She asks him if he doesn't want to go and look at the pigeons, and the piggies and the rabbits, they have been asking for their little master already many times. But he refuses. "How about Deut Messing and Duumke, don't you want to see them?" No, Jeus is not interested. As a last resort mother begins to tell stories. About the angels in heaven. And now Jeus is showing some interest.

"Yes, Jeus, it's so beautiful in heaven. All the angels are singing there, and, boy, they can sing even better than daddy."

"Yes," says Jeus. "I believe that."

Encouraged, Crisje continues. She's telling about the dream she's had:

"There are beautiful trees up there, and flowers, and you can walk there and run around, see, and nobody will stop you. They're leaving people alone there, heh? But before you can get there you'll have to be dead here and buried. And, of course, you have to go to purgatory first, too."

"Nonsense," says Jeus suddenly, "nothing but nonsense."

"You don't mean to say that you can go right straight to heaven? Well, that would be something. Yes, Our Dear Lord wants us to come to heaven, but we have to do something for this, too. And plenty. But it's beautiful there, the birds are singing and the angels eat with spoons made of silver and gold, and they eat just as we do."

"That's also nonsense, it's worse than what you said be-

fore," says Jeus curtly. But mother is patient, she's only too happy that he is listening at all. "Do you think, perhaps, that they don't have to eat there?"

"What we are eating here would make them vomit up there. They'd only spit it out again."

Crisje is beginning to think that she'd better talk about something else now.

"And do you know, Jeus,—God is there everywhere, everybody may see Him and the angels sing for Him. And all the saints are around, too, and they watch out and keep everything orderly."

"Are the angels like children, mother?" Jeus wants to know.

"No, angels are big like grown-up people."

"Oh, yes? Then you don't know anything at all."

Jeus goes back to his thinking. But that's just what mother wants to prevent. Quickly she takes up her tale again while she's lifting him upon her lap:

"I know much more yet, Jeus. Our Dear Lord once lived here on earth and he brought us His Evangel. Then the people went and hung Him on a cross."

"Hung Him,—hung?—hung?" This is a word which he has heard before. "But then they had to bury Him outside of the cemetery?" Mother's mouth is wide open. What can she say to this now?

"No, no, Jeus. They buried Him in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, that's where Our Dear Lord is buried. And they have a light there that is burning all the time. And Mount Calvary is there, too, and the garden of Gethsemane, and many more holy places. That's where Our Dear Lord has lived with us human beings. But the human beings are bad, Jeus, and they went and beat Him and they

have hung Him on the cross, the poor Our Dear Lord . . .” Mother Crisje sees suddenly that she must not say more about this. Little Jeus’ face has turned ash-grey. The tears are running down his cheeks and now he runs away.

“But Jeus, come . . .” she is shaking her head; she had not expected that. After this story it seems that the child has become even quieter. Mother is trying everything to cheer him up. She jokes with him and takes him along on her shopping trips. But he walks next to her as if he were sick and his face is sad, without a smile. Even in church where father is singing he sits absent-mindedly in the corner of the pew and doesn’t see the flowers and the candles and the swinging incense burner, things which he used to admire so.

She has asked Hendrik to keep an eye on the children while she is taking a short walk with Jeus. She wants to speak with him and hopes that this will cheer him up. And while she is talking with him they are going down the gravel road and into the woods.

“Now look, Jeus,” she is saying, “how beautiful it is here. On top of that hill over there where the building is, that’s where many people come every year for their vacation. They are coming here only for a rest because it is so beautiful here. They’re people who are sick. After they have taken their rest, they go back home again and to work. Our Good Lord has something good for all human beings and everyone can have his share of pleasure, see?”

“And that woman there who is coming with her cart full of branches and wood, that’s Mrs. Brinkman. She’s well over eighty years old. She goes out and fetches her own kindling wood for the stove and she would let nobody help her. Jeus, aren’t you happy that you can go with

mother, you and I all by ourselves? Shall I show you our new field which father has rented and where we're going to plant our potatoes?



"Look down there, Jeus, far away, that is Hunsel Mountain and on the other side there is Germany, that's a big country. But down around the corner, if we walk a little further, from there you can see the big smoke stacks; that's where father is working.

"And here, to your left, that's the Plantation, and there's the wall and the old castle where the baron lives. He has a moat that is full of water and goes all around his castle."

These are the things Crisje is talking about and she is

not even aware of the fact that Jeus knows his way around here better than she herself.

"And now we'll go home again," she continues; "mother has to cook the dinner otherwise we won't have anything to eat today. Jeus, are you going to talk again, now?"

With sad eyes Jeus is looking at his mother. He wants to speak, but he finds it impossible. And then they shuffle back home again. . . .

Now father has to try. It must be possible to make their little Jeus happy again. What may be wrong with him? Is he sick? No, that couldn't be, he is still on his feet! Doesn't he get enough to eat? No,—he can have as much as he wants! Aren't he and Crisje nice to him? Well, he can't say that he isn't getting enough love . . .

No, thinks Hendrik, he'll have to talk with him. "Shall I play for you, Jeus?" says he. Jeus should be happy; this is a great present that he is offering to him.

"No, father." The answer sounds short and final.

But this is strange.

"What? Don't you know that all the peasants around here would go down on their knees to hear father play?" Long Hendrik says it with hurt pride. "Shall I sing then?"

"No, father, rather not."

Now Long Hendrik begins to curse: "Dammit, what do you want, then?"

"You mustn't say dammit, mother doesn't want it."

"Well, that's the limit," cries Long Hendrik. "You want to teach me a lesson, too! We don't need that yet, see? Maybe you're sick or maybe you've been sitting in the cellar, and there you can do as you please, but it's getting annoying here. Mother can't sleep any more because of you. I'm sick and tired of it and it is affecting you too. The

whole house is upset, and it's all your fault. Can't you even laugh any more? Go out now and play or I'll go crazy."

No, daddy can't accomplish anything with him. Mother Crisje says:

"We'll let him have his own way. Then we can see what it leads to."

But Jeus doesn't act. For hours he sits at the window, lost in thoughts. Not once is he raising his eyes to look around. His little mouth shows a painful twist and his eyes seem to be looking at the greatest misery in the world. Now they're calling the doctor, although Crisje knows in advance that he wouldn't be able to help Jeus. He gives Jeus a thorough examination but he cannot find anything wrong with him. Crisje does not even bother to fetch the medicine which he prescribes. Crisje knows that there is but one medicine that may help her Jeus, and that is prayer. Crisje prays day and night and she embodies in her prayer all her love, all her faith and hope. But Jeus does not change . . .

As heaven cannot help her, she decides to try herself once more, to bring Jeus back out of the strange, unnerving silence in which he is living. Wherever he goes, whatever he does, she follows him, looking for an explanation for his behavior. Thus she learns more about him and it brings her and the boy closer together than ever. But she finds also that too much questioning makes him obstinate and tends to turn the boy away from her. On the other hand, when she is holding him quietly without saying a word, she is rewarded by a grateful glance of his eyes. The more her spirit is trying to embrace his little soul, the more she can feel the silence and the sorrow that are

within his heart. Sorrow? But what should cause sorrow to her little boy? Why isn't he like the other children who are romping about and playing and don't even know the word sorrow?

One day at noontime as Jeus is sitting with her again in silence, she suddenly seems to see spirits, ghosts. But they disappear quickly as she is bending her head forward to look closer. It must have been her imagination, thinks Crisje. And then, somewhat later, as she is not thinking any more of it, she sees them again, much clearer than before.

They are people, hundreds, thousands, no, millions and they are all running up-hill in one direction. Their bodies are bent as in great grief and their faces show expression of pain with tears running down their cheeks.

Should she ask Jeus if he has seen these people, too?

"It is strange, Jeus, I am feeling so quiet lately, see? Here, inside of me it is so still. But when I look I can see many people, millions of them, and that's something. Do you see them too?"

"Yes, mother, I can see them myself."

Is it imagination? Are his eyes suddenly more alive? Is she coming into his world? For a while they are silent again. She is feeling a pain now, so sharp that she has to sigh; it is a pain that comes from sorrow and it has enveloped her heart. How can a human being bear this?

"Do you feel this too, the pain?"

"Yes, mother, yes."

"Is it very bad, Jeus?"

"It's almost strangling me, mother."

Mother Crisje is pressing her child to her body. Why, this child is carrying the sorrow of millions. How is this?

She is going to learn the reason for this.

"There's nothing else wrong with you, what?"

"No, mother, nothing else. It only hurts so much, right here." He places his right hand upon his young heart.

"I understand, Jeus, but mother shall help you."

It is good to be together, to be as one like Jeus and his mother Crisje.

It is early in the morning of Good Friday and Jeus is even quieter then before. He is sitting at the breakfast table with father and mother, he found it impossible to remain in bed. He can't eat a thing, would not even touch his coffee. Father cannot stand it any longer. For Crisje's sake he has been controlling himself, but at last he jumps up so violently that his chair falls back to the floor.

"It has to stop, I've had enough of it. If that keeps up I'll suffocate. It is as if we were all to be buried today. Dammit, Cris, nobody could stand this."

"Quiet, Hendrik, quiet. Don't you know that this is Good Friday?"

"Yes, yes, I know it. But this has to change or we all are going crazy. What's the matter with that snotnose, anyway? Come on, now, go right back to bed. You're only sitting around here looking at me."

"Yes, father," says the child and glides down from his chair.

Suddenly daddy's bad mood is all gone. He was not really angry, only the situation was getting the best of him. A little scared, now, he says:

"Why, darnit, little fellow, if I can make that out, . . . I'm sorry, Jeus, I will not curse at you any more, see?"

"Yes, father."

"But, start talking again, now, Jeus."

Anxiously the parents are awaiting the reply.

"Yes, father," says Jeus then and they both are looking at each other, father and son.

"Well, you said it now. You know what you have said, don't you?"

"Yes, father, I know it."

"What do you say to that, Crisje? Now at last there's an end to it. He said so himself." Then he turns to Jeus again: "But you have to keep your promise. When I come home tonight, you'll be waiting for me with mother at the street car. Then we'll go home together and drink to our health. Now is that something or is it not?"

It seems that this outlook is making Jeus happy, too. At least he is beginning to eat now and even asks for another sandwich, and he drinks three cups of coffee.

It is eleven in the morning as Jeus suddenly runs outside and down the gravel road. He runs until he comes to the hut of Sint van Tien where he throws himself into the grass. Several hours later he gets up, crosses the Jewish cemetery and runs down the incline into the woods. There he finds a clearing where he lies down. The forest is to him like a mother; the trees are shutting out all outside noises and the pillow of moss on which he is lying is even softer than his own white little bed.

And suddenly little Jeus begins to cry, and the tears are running without stopping. Here, away from all people he can give in to his feelings. Here he can cry himself out. It hurts, yes, but at the same time it brings relief. The birds are looking in surprise at the crying little child and they don't sing any more in the presence of so much grief.

Where is the long man now, and José and the children?

They are not there, and Jeus, who is calling them now receives no answer. All these terrible last days Jeus has not seen them. And although he is crying for them now in desperation, the only answer he is getting is the rustling of the wind in the trees. Jeus becomes bitter, what kind of friends are these? And he thought they were angels. Bah,—

Jeus is looking up and he sees that the trees and bushes are disappearing around him, pitch-black darkness is coming over the forest. It has never been so dark in this world and Jeus is trembling with fright, with sorrow and emotion. He feels like sinking down . . .

Then suddenly a light begins to shine which becomes larger, brighter. Jeus cannot turn his eyes away from it. It is coming close to him and turns the tears in his eyes into sparkling stars and behold, there is the face of the long man, his friend. Jeus jumps into his arms and for a long time he cannot even utter a word. The long man is calming him down.

"Why didn't you come sooner? And where is José, why didn't he come?"

"Today," says the long man, "is Good Friday." And slowly Jeus begins to understand what it was he has been feeling in those last few weeks. Ages ago Christ had died on the cross by the hand of those whom He had loved. He had died all alone under terrible pains and in darkness. The long man cannot explain to Jeus the deep significance of that terrible but sacred event, but he has let him witness in spirit and feeling the silence and darkness and the suffering of Golgotha. Jeus is too young to be told what the reason is for this, but there shall be a time when he shall understand why he, the tender young child, had to go through this on Good Friday.

As Jeus is going later with his friend on the path that is leading him towards his home, he looks years older. And as he walks, he is praying a prayer that is like an offering placed under the cross of Our Dear Lord.

"I shall be good to the people, the human beings, Dear God, and I shall do everything I can to please you . . ."

As they are coming to Crisje's house, the long man says to Jeus:

"Go inside, now, Jeus, mother has been looking for you already. Do you feel better now?"

"Yes, I'm all right again. I'm not afraid any more, I understand everything now. I want to thank you very much." They wave at each other and the long man disappears in a cloud. Nobody can see what the child is waving at, but for him the figure is as real as that of his own father. He runs into the house and he cries:

"Here I am, mother, and I am all well again."

Mother needs no explanation. She knows what has happened to her child, it had come to her like a flash.

"My boy," says she. "I'm so grateful to God." Then she kneels down near Jeus and embraces him.

It is afternoon. They are standing at the streetcar stop and father is waving from the oncoming car. He jumps out. Jeus does not want to drink of the wine which father is serving that evening. Early he is brought to bed and he sleeps until the clock on the church steeple is sounding ten o'clock in the morning. . . .

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Playing in the clouds

JEUSS DOESN'T SEEM TO BE THINKING ANY MORE OF THE TERRIBLE days that he has gone through. Like the child that he is, he runs around with his playmates and roams through town and field. Just as Bernard had done with him, now he can take his younger brothers around and show them the neighborhood, tell them of all the beautiful things that can be experienced here. Look how wide that ditch is,—Jeus shows them how he can jump across. Apples? He gets them in Hendrik's orchard. In admiration they are looking up to him, the little snotnoses. Why? Was it so unusual what he was doing? Ah, he can do even better than that. Just wait!

Today they're playing hide-and-seek on the lea. The lea is the meadow where the bakers have their woodpiles with which they heat their ovens. For hours the children run and play until they are getting tired. Then they sit down in the shade, with their backs against the stacked-up wood.

Anny is asking Matthie what he wants to be when he grows up.

"I don't know yet."

"And you, Teet?"

"I'll go to the city where all the people are, to work there."

"And you, Jeus?"

"I'll write books when I grow up."

"But you'll have to study for that." Anny looks at him.

"I don't care, but I'll write books." For him there are no difficulties.

"What do you want to write, then?"

But Jeus has no mind to tell her. Maybe he doesn't know yet himself what he wants to write about. At any rate, he says:

"Aw, you wouldn't understand, anyway."

But Anny isn't giving up:

"You need money for that, Jeus, and you are as poor as a mouse."

But this objection doesn't seem to make any impression on Jeus.

"That's what you think, hm. Money isn't everything in this world."

Anny is insulted because Jeus doesn't want to tell her. She scolds:

"That's what your mother is always saying. You're aping your mother and pretend that you know this by yourself."

"But I know more than you. All you know is about horses and cows."

That holds her for a while. Anny is quiet now. It takes a long time before one of the children is saying something again. It is so hot, the eyes become heavy. And then Anny says:

"Who knows something? Alie? Matthie? Jeus?"

Jeus is thinking. Suddenly he has an idea:

"We'll go up there on the white clouds to play. Look, up there." His arm is pointing up to the skies. "Do you see?"

Yes, they can see the clouds, but they can't make out how they'd climb up there to play. They are surprised and

look at Jeus. But his face is serious. He's not joking, it seems.

"How do you want to do it, Jeus?"

"You all have to come here to me and lie down, with the feet together and then we'll go to sleep, really, and then we'll see."

Laughing, but curious about the new kind of play, the children do as Jeus tells them.

"Don't laugh now. If you don't want to play, go home, then."

But they all want to play the new game.

"Matthie has to lie here, next to me, and Anny here. Now we go to sleep. Close your eyes, all of you."

How is it that the children, one by one are falling asleep, now? Is it the heat? However that may be, the passers-by see the children sleeping there in the grass and they look like a human star. And whoever sees it will probably smile and go on, unaware of the fact that right at that moment they are playing hide-and-seek on the big white clouds that are drifting up there in the blue sky.

They have counted out, Matthie has to seek. The others are hiding and call: Come now, come . . . Matthie is pretty clever. He is running to the place where Jeus and Anny are hiding. "Now we've to run, Anny, or he'll get us. Give me your hand, then we'll go fast and Matthie can't catch us, for what does he know about this?"

Matthie tries to run to their hiding place, but quick as lightning Jeus and Anny are shooting past him.

"Wow, Jeus, how fast you're going. How do you do it?"

"Aw, you couldn't learn that."

Twice Matthie is out of luck, then he's relieved by Teet. Again Anny and Jeus are hiding together. Jeus says:

"There's Teet now, Anny. Shall we give him a scare?"

'How, Jeus?"

"We'll go through this cloud and get out near Teet. Then we run to the safety-mark." But the beautiful plan goes wrong, somehow. Teet has seen them already and is after them. In his hurry he's not thinking of Anny and alone he reaches the mark.

Now the children are resting a while.

"What you're doing isn't running, Jeus, that's flying." Matthie doesn't think it is fair.

"How do you do it, Jeus?" Anny is curious.

"Yes," says Jeus, "that's a gift. Either you have it or you don't. It's worth more than a hundred cows and horses, more than the whole world."

"But down below the cows and the horses are worth more than all your flying up here . . ."

"That's true, too, Anny, but your horses you have to hold and lead, while my flying goes all by itself . . ."

Far away from the children in the clouds there are two figures: Jeus sees them, they are the long man and José.

"Don't fight now," says Teet, "we're going to play again."

"Come, Anny, we'll go into that dark cloud there. Teet won't be able to find us there." And true enough, Teet can't find them, until they show themselves at last. Then Jeus thinks that it is time to go back to the lea. In a quick sweep the children return to the meadow where their little bodies are still sleeping. As they awaken, they find that they have been drenched by a cloudburst.

"Wow, Jeus, we're all wet." As they are feeling their wet clothing, they even forget to laugh and one by one they're running home. The play is at an end.

Jeus is thinking suddenly of the black cloud where he has been hiding with Anny. That was the one that brought down the cloudburst.

"Where do you come from, Jeus?" asks Crisje. "Couldn't you watch out for the rain? Where were you?"

"We were playing up in the clouds, mother."

Mother Crisje has become used to a great many things, but every time she is surprised anew. "What did you say? In the clouds? You have played in the clouds? With whom?"

While mother is changing his clothes, he is telling her of the play in the clouds. And the next day the whole neighborhood is talking about it.

"Your boy, Crisje, that's a good one. My boy has been in the clouds with Jeus and he came home as wet as a cat. Of course, Jeus was only fooling, just like his father who is fooling people so much, what?"

That's what the neighbors are thinking and soon the other children are making fun of Jeus. "The way he's playing—and fooling, ha, ha . . ."

And mother says: "Well, you shouldn't fool them, then. You have been going too far, see? That's not nice."

But Jeus knows better, especially since he has been going through Paradise again with José. And José told him that it was the long man who had made it possible for the children to play in the clouds.

After this Jeus preferred much to go out alone with his dog Vanny. "Those little nitwits, Vanny, they only make trouble for you, see? They'd rather not learn anything about Paradise."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Angels don't steal

THE DAY OF THE VILLAGE-FAIR IS APPROACHING. EVERYBODY is talking about it. Bernard cannot talk enough about all the wonderful things which he has seen at the fair the year before.

There was a merry-go-round where you could ride on a white horse around and around, and a woman with a beard and it cost only a penny to look at her and two cents to pull at the whiskers, and a "ring-the-bell" which you had to hit with a hammer as hard as you could, and tents where they sell candies. And not to forget the trained fleas and the men who can eat fire . . .

And now Jeus is going to see all these wonderful things himself! Mother has promised him that he may go this year. He wants to have a lot of money for he intends to see everything. How obedient he is these days, and willing to run errands! He is going from house to house to see if he can't earn a penny or two. All the peasants are taking notice. Counting the two cents which Gerrit Noesthede has given him he is now as rich as four cents!

"May I still do anything for you, mother?"

"That's nice of you, Jeus, but won't you rather go and play? Then I'll do my errand myself."

"No, mother, I'll be glad to do it for you."

"Well, then go over to Teet Egging and get me some coffee, what? Teet knows what kind I'm getting."

As he comes back, mother says: "Thank you, Jeus," and then she returns to her work. He still hangs around for a while but Mother Crisje acts as if she didn't notice it. Jeus is disappointed and runs outside. Mother could have given him a cent, at least . . . Maybe he'll be luckier with Aunt Trui. Yes, she, too, has a lot of errands to do, and he carries them all out quickly and accurately. As a reward she gives him—a piece of liverwurst and she acts as if he should even be happy about it. He turns it around in his hands and then he says:

"Could you sell that, Aunt Trui?"

"Why, you want to sell my best liverwurst? What's the reason?"

"For the town-fair, Aunt Trui."

"That's a long way off, Jeus. You eat your liverwurst and then when the fair comes here, we'll see, what?"

No. No luck today. He sits down in front of the house and leans with his back against the fence. Vanny is lying down next to him, his tongue hanging out of his mouth. "Look there now, Vanny," says Jeus. From below the gravel road two ladies are coming. These are probably the rich people of which mother has told him once. You can see that they have money, by the big hats and the fine clothes they are wearing and one of them has a pair of eyeglasses with a handle hanging on her chest while the other one is walking with a stick, probably because she's old. Now they are quite near Jeus. He looks straight at them, into their eyes so that they have to look at him in return. Jeus is thinking of the fair. Now the ladies stop.

"Well, little fellow, how nicely you're playing with your dog. What's your name?"

"Jeus, ma'm."

"Jeus,—that's a nice name. And your dog?"

"Vanny, ma'm."

"What a polite little boy," says the lady to the other one. "And that out here in the country! Where do you live, Jeus?"

"Don't I get anything?" thinks Jeus and says: "Here, ma'm, in this house here."

"Do you like sweets?"

Jeus has jumped up. At last! But at this moment there is mother, she is standing at the garden fence:

"I hope that the child isn't begging, is he?"

"No, ma'm, not at all. But he may have some sweets, or do you mind?"

They give him five cents but mother lets him keep only one.

"If you do that again, Jeus, I'll tell daddy, and then you know what's going to happen."

But this warning has little effect on Jeus. It only makes him more careful, that's all. The following day he lies again in front of the garden gate, but this time more towards the house of Aunt Trui, so that Crisje cannot see him. After about an hour a lady is passing by with a gentleman. And again Jeus acts as he did yesterday. He looks at the couple until they stop. The lady speaks to him:

"What beautiful eyes you have, my boy."

"Yes, ma'm," agrees Jeus.

She, too, wants to know his name. Well, Jeus is more than willing to tell her. It's going to be five cents, maybe even ten, Jeus has figured it all out already.

The gentleman is digging into his pocket. "Would you like to have a dime?" Now, he surely would. He is already standing up. But just as he is reaching for the dime, Long

Hendrik is stepping between him and the gentleman. His daddy, Long Hendrik! And his face, usually so friendly, is now sad and severe at the same time. "But Jeus," says he, "What are you doing now,—you're really begging, heh?"

The blood is rushing to Jeus' cheeks, his hand is falling back, then he runs away, and the lady and gentleman are looking after him in confusion.

He has made his daddy sad, and that is enough for him to cry for hours. Even Vanny cannot console him now, only the long man, his friend himself could. And suddenly he is standing there right in front of him. "You must never do that again, Jeus, or I will not come to you any more."

No, Jeus will never do it again, never.

And one nice morning on a Saturday, big, colorful wagons are coming down the gravel road. Bernard sees them first, and together they are following the wagons. "The fair wagons," says he, and he is right. The wagons are going up to the place where the fair is to open. What a colorful, strange world is showing itself before the astonished eyes of the children: poles and tentcloth and ropes together make booths and tents and merry-go-rounds, and all the little boys are standing around and you could not chase them away. Too bad, thinks Jeus, that he has only very little money left of his savings,—but mother will surely let him have some more!

One more night now, and the fair will be open . . .

That night before they go to bed Jeus is talking with his little brothers Gerrit and Hendrik and tells them about all the things which he is going to see tomorrow.

"There are merry-go-rounds with white horses and men who eat fire and a woman with a beard and the grown-ups may hit it with a hammer, see?"

After High Mass the fair begins. Mother is counting all her change, then she says:

"Jan, here's a dime. Bernard, you get seven cents, and you, Jeus, you get five cents. But don't forget today you won't get any more from me, see, for tomorrow is town fair, too. And now go and have a good time!"

"Where are you going first, Jan?" asks Jeus.

"I don't know yet. I've to see first."

"And you, Bernard?"

"I don't know either. And you?"

"I'll go to the merry-go-round, to sit on a horse and I'm going to ride it so that the sparks will fly."

At the fair it's like in hell's kitchen. The loud music from the merry-go-rounds, the screaming of the barkers and acrobats who are offering their world-famous acts to an honorable—and gullible—public, the hammering on the "ring-the-bell" as well as the noise that the public is making itself,—all this combines into a symphony of confusion. For a moment the children are standing still, then they plunge right into the frolicking crowd. And before they know it they are separated from each other but they don't even notice it, there are so many things to hear and to see.

It did not take Jeus long to find the merry-go-round with the white horses. He picks his horse and as soon as the machine is stopping to get ready for a new ride, he runs to it and with the aid of a tall boy he swings himself into the saddle. He is sitting comfortably on his wooden animal, but presently, as soon as it will hear the snappy music, it will shoot off, like an arrow from the bow. Too bad, thinks Jeus, that he cannot stand up in his stirrups, but his little legs are still too short. But also without the

stirrups his horse shall carry him away quick as lightning. There goes the bell; Jeus is grabbing the bridle more firmly with his little fists. The music starts to play and suddenly underneath him it begins to rumble—the horse is moving! How he has been longing for this moment! People and tents and houses and trees are shooting past him. He is sitting proudly on his horse and the trip is only half over when he decides already to stay on for the next one; of course he wants to keep this fast and trusty mare for that next trip.

Jeus is happy. He is now reconciled with this world where everybody seems to do his best to make him happy: the people who have put up this merry-go-round, the boy who has helped him to climb on, the white horse that is carrying him on his strong back, and last not least the people around who almost all are pointing at Jeus and say: Look at him, a natural-born horseman!

For the fourth time now Jeus has bought the horse for a ride. On his back Jeus' imagination is running riot. This horse never gets tired. He takes the highest hurdles and goes through space with the greatest of ease. For hours he runs and there's no end except the bell that interrupts now and then. Jeus is rich, really rich now. . . .

The music stops, the horse stands still and two hands are lifting Jeus off, setting him on the ground. And now Jeus suddenly isn't rich any more; he has only one cent left in his pocket and the horse with the name "Phantasy" is making off without him. . . .

And the fair doesn't look so friendly any more now that his pennies are gone. He is standing at a tent where a melancholy looking man is trying to draw the people in, telling them that inside "there is the world-famous king

of the chain who has already performed before the emperor of China,—ladies and gen'lmen, the performance is ready to begin, with an extra to boot: the barefoot dance on a carpet of sword points, unheard of, my good people—" and the melancholy man is telling Jeus that he has been standing there long enough now and that he has to go in. As if Jeus were to blame that nobody is interested in the chain trick and the dance of the bare feet, ha . . .

With his last penny Jeus is buying himself a few friendly words and a candy stick.

Then he goes back to the merry-go-round, just to look. And the merry-go-round looks suddenly different, now. Those horses are not even alive, hm . . . no, farmer Hosman's horses, they whinny at least and are so beautiful and warm to touch. Big Piet, for instance sniffs at you so nicely, but these horses here, they're just beanstalks, ha. White horses? Why there's hardly any paint left on these wooden things, hm, and how short these rides are! The people are hardly on their horses and they have to get off already. Those merry-go-round people are only after your pennies! They don't care if you are having fun or not. To the dickens with 'em!

Jeus is still loitering on the fairgrounds but the turmoil and the crowd is becoming annoying. It is dinnertime now, anyway. Father is home because it is Sunday and then it isn't wise to be late for dinner. Sadly, with his hands in his pockets Jeus is shuffling home. In disgust he is kicking the little stones that are in his way. If he'd meet Gerrit Noesthede now by accident, or Jan Maandag, maybe he'd get a penny then. But he doesn't meet anybody. All the people are at the fair or they're sitting at home killing the time of Sunday.

Mother sees his long face and says: "What are you making such a long face for, Jeus? Have you spent all your pennies already? You know that you're not getting any more from me today. After all, we have to eat, too." And father threatens with the cellar.

After dinner he asks Bernard: "Do you have any money left?"

"I still have five cents," says Bernard.

"And you, Jan?"

Jan still has his dime. "What a piker he is," thinks Jeus. "He wouldn't chance anything." But these two can now go back to the fair and he has to stay home.

"Do you still need anything, mother?"

"No, and I won't give you anything either. No is no."

Then let's try Aunt Trui, thinks Jeus. She won't give much, though.

"Aren't you going to the fair, Jeus?" asks Aunt Trui.

"I have been there already, Aunt Trui, but I have no more spending money," says Jeus straight out.

"Well, didn't mother give you anything?"

"Yes, but I haven't got it any more, the fair clowns have it. And they only drink it up in whiskey, anyway." Then he realizes that it was stupid to say that, he's only giving Aunt Trui a reason not to give him any money. And sure enough, she says:

"Then you better not go there any more. That's no good, Jeus, you better stay home."

Out in the street he feels like kicking himself with his own clogs: If I only could keep my mouth shut!

But it doesn't do any good to reproach himself. Leaning against a door post he looks at the farmstead of the Hosmans'. Nobody seems to be home there, they've gone to

the fair, all of them. If Chang and Carlo were here, yes, then he would sell himself to them to go to Italy. For a dime they can have him, yes. But no, a dime isn't really enough. Well, then a quarter. But that isn't enough either. What can you get for a quarter? Another quarter hour is passing by. Tired of standing around he goes to the little yard to lie on the bench. Behind that bench there is a lilac bush. Through a gap in the foliage he can see a piece of the sky. Minutes are passing by and then Jeus feels a silence coming over him and it is as quiet as if he were all alone in this world. He knows this and what it means. The last time he felt it was when he made that trip to the clouds.

Something strange happens: Through the gap in the lilac bush a white cord is coming down and Jeus sees in astonishment how it is crawling on the ground, out of the little yard, over the gravel road and then into the woods. It is like a glistening string and there seems no end to it. Jeus is still asking himself where it may be leading him when he feels that he is freed from his body, and while his little body is remaining on the bench, his spirit is following the cord quick as a bird.

Unerringly the cord has gone on all kinds of paths and roads and suddenly it stops.

"Good heavens," cries Jeus. In the place where the string has brought him in such a miraculous way there are guilders, quarters, dimes and pennies. He counts them, and it is fourteen guilders and sixteen cents. Jeus wants to pick it up but he can't; it remains on the ground. Then he understands that he needs his body to pick the money up, the body which he has left behind on the bench. Quick as lightning he returns into his body which is now awakening from a deep sleep and then he goes back to the woods

where the money is lying. This time it goes much slower, clop-clop go his wooden clogs on the hard road. He doesn't see the cord any more. Panting he runs through the bushes. There is the money. Full of excitement he wants to pick it up, but then the shining figure of the long man appears. Suddenly Jeus realizes who has brought him here to all that money.

"Did you do that? Did you know that this money was here?"

"Yes, Jeus, and you may take it with you, too. You may keep a quarter for yourself and another to buy a nice cake for mother. The rest of the money you'll have to give to mother."

The child is confused and stutters: "I really may keep a quarter?"

"Yes, Jeus. That's all."

"Oh, I thank you so much. I shall never forget that as long as I live. I'll take it now quickly home."

That's more money than he has ever seen before. The long man is still looking at him with a smile, then he disappears. Jeus is running home. "My friend, the long man,"—he was always right there, he could surely count on him. Wait till mother sees this treasure . . .

The money is clinking in his pockets. He stops for a minute and lets the coins run through his fingers. He may keep a quarter for himself, and another one to buy a cake for mother,—he takes the two coins and ties them into a knot in his handkerchief. Then he storms into the house with burning cheeks.

"What's the matter? What the dickens have you got now?"

Panting for breath, Jeus says: "I've found money, mother."

"Money? Where?"

"In the woods, on the ground." He throws the money on the table, the guilders, the quarters and the dimes and pennies.

"So much money!" Crisje is clapping her hands together. "We'll have to bring that right away to Bolders; we cannot keep it, that doesn't belong to us. Maybe they were some very poor people who have lost it."

Then Jeus has to tell how he came to find the money. Mother thinks that it is too strange. Therefore he is not telling anything about the long man, his friend.

"Here," says she, "take these two cents. That's your reward for being so honest. Now you can go back to the fair."

Now that Jeus has money in his pocket again, the fair is receiving him again with the most friendly face. Jeus has forgotten the bad things which he has been thinking about the white horses, and the horses act just as if they didn't know anything about it. Four, five times he is riding on their backs. And he buys a big piece of candy for himself, too, and as he pays he's getting even a lot of change back. He's very careful, of course, that his little brothers don't see him, for then he'd get into trouble, he has not told mother about the quarter which he was allowed to keep. He couldn't tell her, she made such an unbelieving face already. . . . But that she'll find him out as soon as he'd come home with the cake, he's not thinking of that.

It is surprising how much such a young stomach can stand. After eating the candy stick, Jeus enjoys some lemon

drops, gumdrops, chocolate, and at last a piece of tart. But when, after that, he's taking another ride on the white horse of the merry-go-round, he suddenly feels that he's had too much of everything and he decides to go home. On the way home he buys a cake for mother, and it is a big one, he needs both his hands to carry it.

With a glad heart and shining eyes Jeus enters the room where mother, father and Gerrit Noesthede are sitting with a good drink in their glasses.

"Here, mother, that's for you."

"What is it now, Jeus?" Mother tries not to be surprised any more . . . "Where did you get that money? Did you hold out on me? If that is true, then I don't want the cake and I would be very sad. I wouldn't have thought that of you. Tell me now, how did you get that money?"

"I was allowed to keep it."

Jeus' happiness is gone. Tears are coming into his eyes. Now he'll have to tell about the long man. If she's only going to believe him!

"Allowed to keep it? Keep it from whom?" father is asking. Now he has to tell about the long man, and then father will not believe him and send him for punishment into the cellar. How complicated life is!

"From that white cord, yes,—that—that white cord," Jeus is stuttering.

But father is interrupting his nice tale by saying:

"That's impossible. A cord cannot talk. Did you keep something for yourself, too?"

"Yes, I could keep a quarter for myself and also buy a cake for mother: That's what he said."

"Who? Who said what?" Long Hendrik is furious.

"I don't know any more."

Mother is now beginning to tremble. Where does that money come from? It couldn't be that— No, she doesn't want to think of that. That's impossible.

"Just a moment, Hendrik. Jeus, do you still remember where the money was?"

"Yes, mother."

"Gerrit, loan me your bicycle for a few minutes," decides father. "Come with me to the woods, Jeus, and show me where that money was."

Jeus is sitting on the handlebar and directs father to the place. As they get there, Long Hendrik can actually see by the impressions on the ground where the money had been lying.

Returning home, Jeus asks his father:

"Are you still mad at me, father?"

"No, Jeus. To be honest,—no. But we still have to talk about this."

As Crisje hears them coming back, she runs to the door. "Well?" she's asking.

"Yes, that's where it has been lying, at the end of the black road." Mother sighs deeply. Jeus has to tell now once more how it all happened.

"It's strange, Cris, but it is really a wonder."

The four people are sitting there in silence.

Then mother starts again: "But you wouldn't steal, would you?"

"I didn't steal, mother." Jeus is indignant.

And the more Mother Crisje is thinking about the strange case, the more she's convinced that Jeus is innocent. Gerrit is breaking the tension by saying:

"Then this is angel-cake. It comes right straight from heaven. I have to try a piece of that." And now Long

Hendrik says to Jeus: "You have to have something from heaven too,—here, try it . . ."

"And give the angels our compliments, Jeus," laughs Gerrit. "Tell them that they surely know how to bake good cake up there. And do you know what, Hendrik,—this angel cake wants to swim, so come and fill the glasses once more."

A strange day has come to its end. As mother is placing Jeus into bed, he asks her:

"Angels, mother, are they holy?"

"Why sure, Jeus. But why are you asking?"

"And can angels steal?"

"Certainly not, Jeus. They're holy, they don't steal, they cannot commit any more sins."

"And they know everything, mother?"

"Yes, everything."

"Then everything is well."

With his mind at ease, at last, Jeus is falling asleep. His long man is an angel, an angel with much light. He would not cause him to steal. For angels do not steal, mother said so.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

*“Mother, may I ask you
something?”*

IT IS A BAD DAY FOR AUNT TRUI'S ROOSTER. AS SHE IS COM-
ing into the chicken coop this morning, she finds him
there in the corner, all alone and forsaken. And as Aunt
Trui is looking at him, she bursts into tears. Frightened
and browbeaten the rooster is looking at her: he is as
naked as Adam in Paradise; of his colorful soft jacket there
is but one feather left.

“Only that brat of yours can have done that,” says Aunt
Trui to Crisje as she is storming into the Wageman house
with Uncle Gradus on her heels. “If I could prove it, I
would have him locked up, you can be sure of that.”

But they don't know it for sure and therefore have to
leave soon again with much noise and blustering.

Whoever is passing her house that day is called inside
to bemoan the poor rooster who has lost his feathers and
with them his dignity as well. One by one they condemn
the dastardly attack on the proud family head in the
chicken coop, but Aunt Trui is not always sure whether
her visitors are really indignant or whether they are trying
to suppress a laugh.

Gerrit Noesthede, too, is called into the chicken coop.

“You have to see that, how they have treated my rooster.”

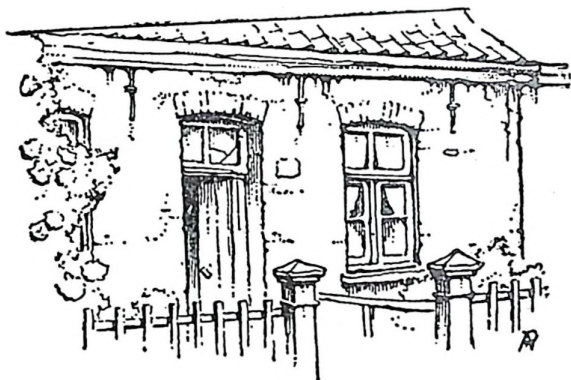
Gerrit cannot believe his eyes. He cries: “Why, the poor

fellow is running around naked,—it's a scandal. And then such a good rooster; I bet his hens wouldn't even look at him any more now."

"In the dead of night they have done it," says Trui with a shrug.

"Who?"

"I think Crisje's Bernard. And if I find out that he did it, I'll report him to the guards."



No, Gerrit cannot believe that. No, the boys of Crisje wouldn't do anything so scandalous. They are very fond of animals.

As he is later coming to Aunt Crisje, he is laughing. "If I knew who has done that to Aunt Trui I'll give him a whole quarter. He's really a sight, that rooster, you have to see him. Does Hendrik know it already?"

"Yes, he laughed too, but he has talked to Bernard about it."

"Do you think that Bernard has done it?"

"He says that he doesn't know anything about it. But he has been sent down to the cellar lately quite often."

Jeus, too, looks with sympathy at the picked rooster. "That's real bad, Aunt Trui."

"Sure, Jeus. Do you know if Bernard has done it? Didn't he say anything?"

Jeus makes his sweetest face. "No. I would tell you, you know that, Aunt Trui."

But in the meantime Jeus remembers what Bernard had said on that Sunday at the fair. Three, four times Bernard had seen Jeus riding on the merry-go-round. "How do you get so many rides? Did mother give you any more money?" Bernard had asked him. "No." "—Aunt Trui, then? She gave me nothing, and I ran two errands for her and I chopped a whole lot of wood for her, and all that I got from her was a piece of liverwurst." And then Bernard had said in a threatening way: "But I'll give it to her, she'll get it from me."

Jeus is looking again at the rooster and says to Aunt Trui:

"They have taken off his pants. But which one, his Sunday pants or the one he's wearing on weekdays?"

A moment later Jeus is outside with one red cheek.

Well, it seems that Bernard is on the spot, more or less. Anybody can see that. Jeus is speaking with him about the rooster:

"You surely did a good job there, Bernard. You took off his pants and his shirt, too." But Bernard does not fall for Jeus' compliments.

"Hold your mouth, snotnose," says he. "I don't know a thing about it. And if you say that again, then you'll see something. Then we'll find out who is stronger, you or I."

But Jeus keeps on vexing his brother. He wants to rub it in:

"I really think it wasn't nice of you to do that. The poor rooster is catching a cold now. Come with me again, Bernard, you'll laugh yourself sick."

"I've no time for this nonsense."

"Aw, you're lying. You're afraid that Aunt Trui may grab you and bring you to the guards."

"If you don't keep your face shut, I'll shut it for you."

"Bah,—you may be older than I but I'm not afraid of you."

Then the fight begins. The two boys are hitting each other wherever they can. Mother Crisje is hearing the uproar and runs outside to pull the fighters apart.

"Will you stop it now? Come inside, both of you,—you can go for me to Willemse's to fetch the flour."

And a little later the two boys are walking peacefully together on the gravel road. In order to appease Bernard completely, Jeus says:

"You surely have a lot of nerve, Bernard."

"I didn't chance anything, Jeus. You make a mountain out of a moleheap. If you keep your mouth shut now, I'll leave you alone, too." Thus he has now admitted his deed unintentionally. But Jeus' admiration flatters him. His face is becoming friendly and around his mouth there appears a smile. Suddenly he bends down and picks up a flat little stone which he throws high into the air. Then he puts his hands into his pockets and starts to whistle. Jeus is imitating him. The soft wind is full of the sweet scents of spring. A tender green is covering the branches of the trees. The birds are flying around busily and their warble fills the air. Nature is full of strength and growth. No wonder that the boys are whistling. Jeus doesn't know yet that he is now going to witness something that will open a door in his

little soul, something that will be on his mind for months, an event which has rarely been experienced so deeply by a child.

As they are coming to the farmstead of Willemse's, Hans the bull is being led out. As Jeus asks, Bernard tells him



that the bull is to mate with a cow. "Look, there's the cow already."

In spite of Bernard's explanations, Jeus cannot understand what is going to happen, but soon he shall see for himself. The unexpected events are following each other rapidly. And Jeus sees suddenly in the center of a cloud the high figure of his friend the long man. He is radiating a brilliant light which is shining upon Jeus, the bull and the cow; everything else seems to be disappearing.

Jeus is now just as old as José and thus he is able to understand this sublime and yet so natural phenomenon: The bull is creating! Jeus witnesses the entire process. In one jump the bull is mounting the cow from the rear and she is trembling under the power of her roaring mate. And as she has received his gift, the cow suddenly becomes transparent for Jeus and he can see, within one minute, what otherwise develops through the whole period of

gestation: A calf is conceived, it takes form, it moves and at last leaves its warm housing to come to the world!

"Oh boy, is that beautiful!"

"You mean what Hans is doing?" It is Bernards voice that is asking this question. His brother's voice brings him back to reality, to the farmer and his hired men. A little confused he looks around. The long man isn't there any more and the light has disappeared.

"What is beautiful? What Hans is doing?" Bernard is insisting.

Jeus finds it difficult to express his feelings in words. "No, not that,—the other thing, but what do you know about that?"

Hans is standing there now, tame and quiet. He is pushing his neck against that of the cow as if he were caressing her. Then comes Betty the cow maid and takes him away; quietly he is shuffling behind her.

Jeus is running alone in the woods while Bernard brings the bag with flour to his mother. It is hard now for Jeus to collect his thoughts. The event which he has witnessed is bringing hundreds of problems into his mind, problems which have to be digested, solved. A hole has been knocked into his little soul and now he has to close it again. Of course this experience is of deep significance, just as everything else in his little life, although he is still too young to understand all this now. This will come much, much later. However, the first consequence of his experience is that it makes him think, think about the problems that are of cosmic transcendancy, that are pertaining to "creation."

Mother Crisje finds Jeus near the rabbit coop. He is so busy that he doesn't notice her until she's asking him what

he's doing there. Seriously and without restraint he answers:

"I want to find out about the young ones, mother. I know how they come." The fright which mother Crisje feels at this answer enables her to reply with the same calm:

"Get out of here. I'll teach you . . . to fool around here with the rabbits. I'll tell daddy."

She is taking the rabbits away from him and gives him a few slaps instead.

However this only tends to make his ear feel hot and his desire for an answer has not cooled off at all . . .

Now he runs to Gerrit, Gerrit the hired man of farmer Hosman's. On the way there he sees two pigeons. Immediately he stops and follows the two birds with his eyes. "Look," thinks Jeus, "the one pigeon is acting almost exactly as Hans did." And then he remembers that several times he has seen dogs doing this but that he had not understood. And then he thinks of the calf and then of Lettie the dog who had puppies every year again. There you are,—when the animals do as Hans did, they have young ones. Jeus is glad he came to this conclusion.

"Howdy, Gerrit."

"Hi, Jeus. Want to visit me?" Gerrit with his impudent pugnose and the obstinate lock of hair which he has to stroke back out of his eyes always, Gerrit is fond of Jeus.

And Jeus looks so preoccupied, he surely has something on his mind again.

"Gerrit?"

"Yes, Jeus?"

"There are still cows in this world who have something else to do but eat themselves round and give milk?"

Gerrit has to think a minute.

"Well?" says Jeus.

Gerrit says: "Yes, Jeus, these are bulls."

"Oh, bulls. Now I know."

In the meantime Gerrit keeps on working. He is shoveling manure onto the wagon.

"Gerrit?"

"Yes, Jeus?"

"Does Hosman have 'Hanses' just like farmer Willemse?"

"Yes, Hosman has these too. Have you been at Willemse's?"

"Yes, and there I have seen Hans do his work."

"And you have looked your eyes out of your head, have you?"

"Yes, but not for that. For something altogether different. Does Hosman have horses too that work as Hans did, Gerrit?"

"He's getting funny now," thinks Gerrit. "I think Long Hendrik should tell him all that." And then he says:

"Jeus, I have work to do. I have no time now." He goes to the wagon.

"All right, then I'll run along." Jeus says it snappily.

"So long, Gerrit."

"So long, Jeus."

"Come, Vanny, let's go to the yard. The people act as if they didn't know anything; we'll have to find out for ourselves."

Jeus is stretching himself in the grass, he folds his hands under his head and looks straight up to the sky. He is thinking now. He looks at Vanny. "Dammit, Vanny," says he, "you dogs are just as the cows and the bulls, only you bark and they snort, but otherwise it's all the same."

Jeus is going to mother now. Crisje is busy preparing the potatoes.

"Mother, may I ask you something?"

"What do you want to know?"

"When the children come, mother,—” but that's all he can say; mother has to go suddenly into the garden and Jeus is looking after her in surprise. "Good heavens, now this," thinks Crisje in exasperation. But Jeus and Vanny have followed her into the garden. The child wants an answer to his question. Crisje feels that she cannot escape this by going away. She has to listen to him and answer him as clearly as possible. A slap on his ear will not do here. Quickly she utters a short prayer.

"What do you want to know?"

"I want to know, mother, when you are together with daddy, is he then like Hans and you as the cow?"

"What,—what—what are you saying there?" Crisje is stuttering. Jesus, Maria, Joseph—how does the child come to such questions?

Jeus continues patiently: "I wanted to know, mother, if you are like the cow that does nothing but give milk and if only father does the work like Hans at the Willemse's?"

Crisje feels hot and cold chills on her back. At last she says: "Why, don't you know that yet?" This question is really superfluous. Crisje knows it, but in her confusion she doesn't know what else to say. Quickly she adds: "Jeus, you have to ask daddy about these things, he has more time than I have and he knows so much." She hopes that the boy will be satisfied with this. Hendrik shall be able to give him the right answer. But Jeus does not want any delay.

"But, mother, if I give you a hand here, can't we then talk together?"

"I know that, too, but now that won't do. I still have to take care of Hendrik."

"Take care of Hendrik . . ." Jeus remembers. That's what mother always used to say when she went to nurse Hendrik.

For a moment Jeus is standing there in deep thoughts. On his little forehead there are wrinkles and his eyebrows are drawn together over his eyes in one line. Then suddenly his tension eases and he dances around in the room. "Mother," he cries, "I know enough already. Now I'll be able to help myself."

"What do you know then?" mother is calling after him. But Jeus is already outside. There is Mother Crisje, she makes the sign of the cross and prays the Lord's Prayer three times, together with the Ave Maria . . .

Jeus knows a lot now already, but he doesn't know everything by far. His head is hurting him from all the "thinking" he's doing. And the grown-up people are not making it easy for him either when it comes to penetrating the great secret which he is trying to solve. Father's answer to his question was a hefty slap on his backside and it seems that he is such a bad boy now that he cannot even sleep in father's bedroom any more; he has been exiled to the other room.

And there is a new problem that's popping up now: whenever he is going through the garden and sees the flowers and the cabbages, the beans and lettuce plants, the question arises in his mind: . . . and how do they get their

young? Do they, too, act as Hans and the cow? Well, he has never seen them do it and he cannot understand it. Again the garden becomes for him a new world filled with secrets and dark wonders, and Jeus can pass his time there for hours. Vanny is following him with every step and listens attentively to all his contemplations and conclusions.

"Do you know, Vanny, what we have to do? No, of course you don't know that." Jeus had said this one day to his dog. With half open mouth and the head askew, the dog follows his little master in every movement. And these movements are strange, indeed: Jeus is picking two flowers of the same color and presses them together. Then he digs a little hollow in the ground and places the flowers into it. And he does the same with beans, with lettuce, potatoes and cabbage. Now they're going to have "children" thinks Jeus. And in order to help this process along, Jeus puts plenty of manure on them, calling it by himself "milk."

When Jeus is so quiet, Mother Crisje does not trust him altogether. She is calling from the window, asking what he is doing there so busily?

"Playing, just playing."

"Yes, and pulling out plants and vegetables, heh?"

"No, what makes you think that? I surely wouldn't do that."

Jeus can easily promise that: the plants are all underground again. He stamps the earth down with his foot; tomorrow he shall come and look, then there will be young ones.

But the next day there are no young ones. As Jeus is scraping the soil away he can see that right away. Sadly he shows Vanny the lettuce plants that are already rotting.

And the flowers are fading away. "They have fallen asleep and now they're dreaming. But I'll teach them a lesson. He takes them up again, presses them together, puts them back into the ground and stamps the earth down, firmly with his clogs.

"And if you don't do your best now," says he, "then I won't give you another drop of milk and then you may see something. You can't fool around with me. Go ahead now, to work, and be quick about it."

Thus Jeus is talking to himself or rather to the plants and flowers, and he is dead serious about it. The great problem is in his head every minute of the day. Now he is running to the hollow where he has planted the carrots but to his surprise they, too, have not been successful in producing young. Jeus thinks that the way Hans is doing it is a whole lot better. As he is pressing the carrots together he tells them that they cost six cents a pound and that they should hurry to have children. "Isn't it true, Vanny? Six cents?" And the dog barks as if he were not quite sure of the price. And Jeus is running to mother and asks her:

"Mother, how much are the carrots?"

"What do you have to know now again?" more to herself than to Jeus.

Once you start talking with that boy there's no end to it, therefore she thinks it best to pretend that she hasn't heard his question. And on tiptoes she disappears into the house. And Jeus, as he sees that his mother isn't there, continues his strange activities.

"Let me see now,—they are certainly not more than six cents. Now, that isn't so much, those carrots don't have anything to brag about,—what is six cents? Ha. But still, we have to help them, Vanny, otherwise they won't have

any children." And Vanny seems to have understood this call for cooperation: he lifts his foot and sprinkles the plants generously.

"That you should have so much brains, Vanny. I never would have thought it. It's a good thing that you are beginning to help us, your loafing and idling must have an end, now. Now they have had their milk, Vanny, so I think that they should grow from now on."

Children need milk for growing. The calf gets its milk from the cow, Hendrik can drink from mother and he, Jeus, is giving the plants what they need. Jeus is thinking of this as, a little later, they are stopping by the piggies who, too, are drinking from their mother. Jeus is looking at them with great, animated eyes. How beautiful all this is!

"See, Vanny, this big one there, that is the mother of all the little ones. She is the center of their life. And her man is just like Hans."

Thus Jeus is going after the secret of creation, trying to close the gap that has occurred in his mind at the time of the great event at Willemse's. It is not easy for a little fellow to find his way here. The grown-ups who really could help you are not willing, and when you ask too many questions, their long arms are shooting out and give you a spanking.

Well, little boy, you have to find out all by yourself!

Jeus goes from stable to stable. For hours he can lie on his tummy and observe the animals in their doings. Jan is telling him that at the de West house there are puppies. And he runs there, together with Vanny who is barking excitedly.

"May I see the puppies, Hendrik?"

"You'll have to ask Alfred, Jeus."

It's all right with Alfred. "Go with me, Jeus. But you'll have to leave your own dog outside, or there'll be a fight."

"No, Vanny has to see them, too. Vanny doesn't bite, Alfred." Jeus reassures him.

"All right then, let's go."

But Vanny has hardly looked around the corner and there is the fight. A minute later they are standing outside again, without having seen any puppies. "Well, what's that now, Vanny?" But Vanny doesn't hear him any more. Yipping and barking he is running after a cat. The quiet, peace-loving Vanny shows himself as a bloodthirsty animal, anxious to kill his arch enemy. And the cat can only save herself by climbing into a tree. Furiously the dog is jumping up against the tree trunk while the cat does not turn her eyes away from him. Jeus can hardly pull his dog away. He has a new plan now: "Where was that again where mother said they have kittens?" "At Mrs. Ruikjes'." "I want to see the kittens. Let's go there."

Mrs. Ruikjes is opening the door herself.

"Mrs. Ruikjes, may we see the kittens?"

"Of course, Jeus,—you like animals, what? Come in."

As she sees how tightly Jeus is holding his dog, she says: "You can let him go, Jeus. These two know each other."

And there are the newborn little kittens crawling around their mother. Jeus strokes their fluffy little bodies tenderly, carefully. He wants to know everything about the little animals.

"Do they drink already, Mrs. Ruikjes?"

"Yes, Jeus, they do that right away."

"How old are they then?"

"Well, let me see, they must be ten days now. Look, they're going to drink now."

"That's pretty. They're getting milk from Mientje, yes?"

"Sure. Did you think they'd get old hundred-proof?" Mrs. Ruikjes has to laugh. She gives Jeus a cooky. While he is eating it, he asks in all seriousness: "Isn't the man home?"

Mrs. Ruikjes understands him wrong. "My man?" she's asking.

"No," says Jeus. "I mean Mientje's man." Mrs. Ruikjes is a little quicker with her answers than Mother Crisje. She says:

"No, he is not home. He's left Mientje."

Jeus is indignant. "Left her?" He realizes the consequences of this faithless act. "With all these children?"

"Yes, isn't that something!"

"What a meany! That's dirty, heh? Maybe she's been not nice to him, heh?" That happens too, thinks Jeus. He has heard about that several times, only recently, about Mrs. Duikelar who pestered her husband right out of the house.

"What a nice boy," thinks Mrs. Ruikjes. She can hardly refrain from laughing as she's saying.

"I don't know, Jeus. But you know very well that, where there is a fight there are two who are guilty."

"These kittens, are they all females, Mrs. Ruikjes?"

"We can only find that out when they grow up, Jeus. But now you have to go home." She is giving the boy another cooky and then she tells him that he may come back to see the kittens whenever he wants to.

This case has made a great impression on Jeus. What a mean guy, this father-cat! He surely doesn't care about his children! Maybe those little ones are all females. That

would be good, they're usually not so mean. Just as it is with the chickens. The chickens? Jeus is stopping in his track. Here's something wrong again. Mother has one man. Mientje, too. But which one of the chickens is the wife of the rooster? As Jeus is coming home he looks into the chicken coop. He is trying to find out which one is the wife of the rooster. Well, there're fourteen chickens. Therefore the conclusion is that the rooster has not one but fourteen wives. And as Jeus is asking mother why a rooster has so many wives, again he is not receiving an answer. Mother is suddenly very busy again.

It seems that the plants and flowers don't want any children. One day Jeus is convinced of this and he takes them all and throws them on the manure pile. "All right, then, if you don't want to work, I won't let you have another drop of milk. And you won't either, Vanny, what?"

One hot day in August Jeus is sleeping in the grass on the lea, right near one of the staples of fire wood. Again he is experiencing the wonder of Hans. But now he is not standing there to look with great, astonished eyes. He is now fully conscious of the whole process. Slowly he has pieced it together for himself in his soul. Hans is a bull, a man-cow. The rooster, Vanny, father, and he, too, are men. Lettie and the chickens and the cow are like mother, women. A rooster looks different from a chicken, and he, Jeus, is entirely different again from Betje who is a girl who is to become a woman later. He knows that, he has found it out when they went swimming. Betje had undressed and gone in the water with them. Without evil thoughts he had looked at her little body which was very pretty and altogether different from his own. This has to be, too, for a young one can grow within the body of a

cow but not in that of a "Hans," and with the human beings it's the same: He himself grew within mother and not in father and the stork has nothing at all to do with this. That's nonsense. But to have a baby you have to marry first. Hans and the cow, mother and father, they are married, and later he shall marry, too, and then he will not forsake his wife the way the he-cat did.

The only riddle that is left now for Jeus are the flowers and the beans and lettuce. Why they could not have children, he could not understand yet. Probably it is altogether different with them again. At any rate, he doesn't care so much about this now, the most important things have become clear to him.

Dancing with happiness he's coming home and falls into his mother's arms. "Now I have nothing more to ask you, I know everything, mother."

What else can mother Crisje do but be happy with him? And with an almost serious face she says to him:

"Eat now something, my boy. You must be starving. Studying can make a fellow tired and hungry, too."

"Tired, yes, and hungry," echoes Jeus. "But wise, too." All by himself Jeus has accomplished an important step in his development, he has learned about the process of creation and it is certain that his growing young mind has obtained a strong moral support through this. Maybe Mother Crisje was feeling this within her heart when she made her little joke.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A thousand guilders for a secret

TODAY, MOTHER IS WAKING THEM ALREADY AT FIVE o'clock. Three of them are to go to the woods to pick berries, Jan, Bernard and Jeus. And Vanny, of course, who is inseparable from Jeus. It is pretty to see the dog of this little boy who is going out with him every day into the fields and woods and who is talking to him as if he were a human being himself.

While the children are dressing, mother is preparing their sandwiches, for they are going to stay out all day. They have to be quiet, and that is pretty hard for them, especially if you consider all the new and beautiful things that are awaiting them in the forest. The trees are already expecting Bernard who shall climb up high in their branches, and the squirrels want him to race with them from branch to branch, from tree to tree. For Jan the woods are promising a shady place and a soft pillow of moss on which he can sleep. And the trees, the birds and the flowers are now already thinking of the many tales which they are going to tell Jeus as soon as he is coming. Even for Vanny the woods have provided something: There are holes all around where he can stick his head in and bark and blaff for the life that is hiding there.

Bernard is looking out through the window. The sun is shining warm already so early. And suddenly he sees a

man who is walking in their garden, looking for the number of the house. What does he want?

"Mother, there's a funny man outside with a black hat; he's in our garden." But as mother is coming to the window, the man has already disappeared.

With two pails and a lot of bread the children are going on their way. They have a lot of fun in the woods and at the end of a long day they're coming home with their pails full and their tummies empty. And there is the man with the black hat, sitting in their living room with mother and a cup of coffee. The children are looking surprised from one to the other. Crisje is saying to the man:

"Look now, Jan, these are the other three; this one is Jan, this one Bernard and that's Jeus. You and the boys will be good friends, I know it already."

"Is he staying here then, mother?"

"Yes, if daddy says yes."

"But where is he going to sleep then?"

"Daddy and I are going to see to that."

As father is coming home he looks just as surprised as the boys. Mother is introducing the man to him: "That's Jan Kniep, Hendrik. You probably do not know him so well, but I have been sitting on his knee when I was little, and later he went to India, and now he's back, but his sister doesn't want him. He's sick, see? But I don't want to leave him in his trouble. May he stay with us, Hendrik?"

The two men are looking at each other. Then Long Hendrik shakes hands with Jan. He says to Crisje: "You know what we have planned, Crisje."

It appears that Mother Crisje has not even been thinking that Long Hendrik might refuse; her preparations are

all made. She says: "Hendrik, then you'll have to build a little room upstairs in the attic, Jan can help you."

After dinner Long Hendrik and his new friend are sitting on the bench in the garden. They're lighting their pipes, and while the tobacco is glimmering, Jan is telling Hendrik about himself. It is not a long story, and it is not a happy one, either. In the colonial service he had gone to the Far East where he had married a native woman by whom he had two daughters. After some time a growth appeared on his throat. The doctors declared that it was cancer! It caused him very much pain, but then something else began to torture him: home-sickness.

He was declared unfit for further service and discharged with a little pension. The years passed by and the suffering caused his body to become weak and tired. Then he could not stand it any longer; he provided for his family and took the boat to Holland. Here, he hoped gradually to recover. "I was the happiest man when I saw my old country again, and my sister." Long Hendrik is listening to him attentively. He has already reconciled himself to the fact that this man is to live with him under the same roof. Jan's sister had listened to him, too, and she had shown enough pity for him in words. But when he told her about the small pension, she had let him know that, of course, she was happy enough that he had come back from that "monkey-land," but that he should have brought a little more money, too. The amount which he named was not sufficient to give him room and board, and the sickness, she said, was too disgusting and dangerous for her to have anything to do with, and "please," said she, "you mustn't mind me telling you that." And now he was here, he said

to Long Hendrik, and he hoped that he would not cause any trouble . . .

Jan has made himself at home. He has his little room now in the attic. There, on a little box stands the photograph of Jan in his soldier's uniform and next to it there lies a large piece of mother-o'-pearl: a sea-shell. In this you can hear the murmur of the sea, Jan had told the children and with strange apprehension they lifted the shell to their ears and listened to the far, mysterious noise. Jan has his own towel and soap, also his own plate and cup. Now that he has found a home and so much friendship, his sorrowful face is lighting up and he is beginning to feel comfortable.

And can he tell stories! Evening after evening he is bringing the children to India, to the cities and deserts, and he introduces them to the natives and the Chinese traders. When they grow up, the children want to go to India, Jan, Bernard, and Jeus, too. His peppery tales about the service and his comrades he is reserving for Long Hendrik who can laugh about all this so loud that Mother Crisje can hear him in the kitchen.

Crisje, on the other hand, has now something else to worry about. Jan's sickness is demanding much of her care and time, but she is doing everything for him she can, in a charitable way. Indeed, every member of the family has to contribute in some way or other towards the comfort of their guest. But in spite of all the care that Jan is receiving, his ailment is becoming worse all the time. Jan is suffering horrible pains.

"You have pain, don't you? The swelling is quite big." Jeus looks worried as he is speaking to Jan.

"Once in a while, Jeus," says Jan. "It could be worse."

"Why do you talk differently from us?" Jeus wants to know from Jan who has lost his dialect.

"You speak like that when you have been away so long."

Then the doctor is called. His face is serious as he is looking at the sick man and he advises that Jan should go to a specialist in Arnheim. An operation might be necessary. But the specialist advises against an operation. Jan is coming back from Arnheim with a great many prescriptions. Crisje is trying twice as hard now to help the sick man, but after a few months the doctor has to be called again: the swelling has broken up and it is bleeding. The doctor is calling it now "bleeding cancer." Crisje's duties with the sick man are becoming more and more strenuous and the doctor doesn't like the idea of the sick man being in the household of Hendrik with all the children. But Crisje will not hear of his removal; she would not now let her patient go into the care of someone else.

"Everything you do with love is done with the aid of Our Dear Lord. Hendrik and I and the children, we are all safe. I know it."

And more than ever Crisje is praying these days, and one day He is telling her that Jan cannot completely recover any more, that the wound will close for a time, but that it will break open after that and "then," says the Lord, "is the time that I shall be calling Jan to Me."

Clearly and distinctly the Lord is telling all this to Crisje, in contrast to the doctor who declares that the wound will never close again. All that she is asking him now is to let her have a lot of gauze and cotton.

Twice a week Crisje is now running over to the farmstead of Mr. Hosman and when she comes back she has a little bag in her hand. Nobody knows what she has in it,

only Crisje and Our Dear Lord, and they can keep a secret . . .

With this bag, the cotton and her prayer Mother Crisje is fighting the dangerous wound. But there's someone else who also knows what she has in the little bag which Crisje is tying on the wound, and that is Jeus. With his strange eyes he is looking right through the cotton and, winking at his mother, he says: "I know what it is, but I won't say anything."

After two months the doctor is coming again. He is worried, the poor doctor. Of course, thinks he, something bad has happened to his patient. But as he looks at him, he cannot believe his eyes. "Why, Crisje, a miracle has happened!" The wound has closed.

For a long time the doctor is now talking with Crisje. She has to tell him the secret how she has helped his patient. He says that he is ready to pay her a thousand guilders if she will tell him. Right smack on the table of the house. And as Crisje still refuses to tell him how she has been able to close that terrible wound, the doctor tries it in a different way: "Crisje, we could help thousands of human beings. Just think of it!" But Mother Crisje insists: "That which comes from Our Good Lord is not for sale."

"But Crisje, understand me right: I am talking here to help many other human beings; I don't want to buy you out . . ."

"But, my dear doctor, don't you understand that this cure here is effective just for this one particular man; it would not help anybody else."

No, the doctor cannot understand that. "Our Good Lord, isn't he a loving father for all? He loves all His children. Can He give preference to one of His children

over all the others? Crisje, you yourself love all human beings, you don't prefer one before the other?"

No, the doctor cannot understand Crisje. But Crisje shall make him see the point. For quite some time she is staring on the floor in front of her, and just as the doctor is thinking that she is now going to tell the secret, she asks:

"Doctor, can you pray?"

"I don't know, really." The doctor is surprised. "If I have to I'll do my best."

"All right then, suppose you have prayed for months,—no for years for your sick child and at last God answers your prayer, does He have to make then another child well, too? A child for whom nobody has prayed?"

"Oh, you mean to say, then, Mother Crisje, that this remedy will help really and truly only in this single case?"

Yes, that's what Crisje means. And thus Jan himself is finding out that Crisje has never forgotten to include him every night in her prayer.

Jan is on his feet again, he's feeling fine. But Crisje is warning him; she has not forgotten the words of Our Dear Lord.

"Don't forget now, Jan, you'll never be quite well again."

"I don't care about that. As it is I am pretty happy now and really thankful to God—and you. And I'd rather die here,—and if it be on the manure pile—than among strangers, for here I feel warm, inside and out."

"If you weren't a good man, Jan, Our Lord would not have helped you as He did,—do you know that? Only those who are ready to bow their heads can be helped." But Mother Crisje adds quickly: "And then only if they have paid for their old sins."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Schooldays

JEUS HAS GROWN INTO A STRAPPING YOUNGSTER. HE IS AL-
most as big as his brothers and surely as strong as Ber-
nard. His pleasant little pugnose has not changed and his
eyes are radiating with alertness and love of life, while his
hair has become more dense—and also more obstinate.

He is ready now for the great adventure which is com-
ing into the life of every child: his first day in school.

Mother Crisje is asking herself how this boy is going to
make out in school. She is thinking of the thousand and
one questions which he has asked her already in his short
life, questions that were sometimes so deep that she her-
self could not answer them properly. Her other children
were never so anxious to learn. And how he could say
things, sometimes, that later on came literally true! And
several times he had repeated discussions, word for word
which he could not possibly have heard himself for the
simple reason that at that time he had been somewhere
else. A boy who was able to look into other people's minds
so sharply, who could feel things and events as he could,
would certainly be an unusual pupil in school. At least
that's what Crisje thinks.

Yes, his teacher finds that Jeus is an unusual child and
she loses no time in telling Crisje so. Already after one
month she invites Crisje to come to school so that she can
talk with her about Jeus. She wants to know if Jeus has

always been such a stupid child? Has he ever had any trouble with his head? As she is asking this she is pointing significantly to the place where the brain is supposed to be. Of course she doesn't like to tell this to the mother, but she finds that Jeus is not able to remember anything at all what he has been taught. He can't understand, he can't remember,—in short, the child is unusual, yes, unusually poor in his studies.

Mother Crisje is surprised to hear all this. Her boy should not even be able to multiply by two?

And Long Hendrik is disappointed, too. But Mother Crisje is helping him to get over this, and whoever can do that can do more than multiply by two . . .

Long Hendrik had already been planning a great future for his Jeus. He wanted him to become a priest, or maybe a professor, and now there's Miss van Wessem his teacher and she's telling him that there is no boy more stupid in her class than Jeus Wageman!

This is not a nice time for Jeus. The words of Miss van Wessem are not penetrating into his skull. Full of sweetness and friendliness they come a-flying but they crash against a wall that seems to be built around Jeus' brains to keep all learning and school-wisdom out.

Mother has begged Jeus not to cause any trouble for her and to listen well at his lessons and Long Hendrik has warned him of the disgrace he would bring to his poor father if he would fail in his studies, and therefore Jeus is doing his level best to help his teacher, to learn in school and to absorb wisdom; yet, his brain-chamber remains empty . . .

Now he's giving up. He lets his thoughts drift away,—on the wings of his imagination he is escaping from the

dreary school-room and Miss van Wessem and goes into the woods to his trees and animals and up into the clouds in the blue. And only as Miss van Wessem is clapping her hands together and starts to pray the Lord's Prayer he's coming back from his long trip, for now school is out! With the other children he runs outside where Vanny is already waiting for him.

For Vanny the morning hours are much too long. He cannot understand what his little master wants in that big building. Longingly he is thinking back of former days when they were both together all day long, roaming around the country side. And when he tries to give in to his sad feelings and starts to yowl, they even tell him to keep quiet. Punctually he is on his spot near the fence waiting for Jeus and as soon as he sees him coming among all the other children he runs towards him and then he does not care whether he bumps into anything or anybody that is in his way.

Jeus himself doesn't deserve any credit for being promoted to the second class. For this he is obliged exclusively to his classmate Gerrit, the son of the baker who is sitting next to him in school. This rotund, redhaired little boy is literally working for two. He permits Jeus to "copy" from him, and Jeus has become quite proficient in this art.

When he grows up, Gerrit shall certainly become a very successful merchant. Nothing for nothing, that's his slogan. Jeus is bringing apples, pears, plums and sausage by the pocketfuls in order to fill the bottomless hole which Gerrit calls his mouth. In this way he is buying from Gerrit for a certain time the right to "copy." As Gerrit has finally lost his taste for fruit, Vanny is used for payment: Jeus permits Gerrit to pet Vanny and this pays Ger-

rit so that he permits Jeus to copy for a week. A little trick done by Vanny will pay for a month's right to copy.

In the third year the two boys are sitting together again, and they continue to cooperate in the way which has proved to be so successful in the previous years.

The schoolmaster, too, is not very successful with Jeus. Usually the boy cannot answer his questions and then he gets poor marks. But as soon as he is teaching about the life of human beings and animals, Jeus is all attention and his eyes will not leave the master's mouth. Fine and pointed are his answers here and sometimes he asks questions which are so deep that the schoolmaster looks at him in astonishment, not knowing how a child can come to such thoughts. Since this subject is Gerrit's weakness, Gerrit is forced to respect his otherwise so stupid mate at least in this somewhat.

In all the other subjects, however, Jeus seems to be a failure. During these hours he lets his imagination play. He makes long trips in his thoughts; he is able to do this now without trouble; he doesn't have to fear that the voice of the schoolmaster may call him rudely back to reality, for he has learned to divide his spirit: the one half is running outside and playing, while the other half is in class watching. And this latter half is warning him when the master wants to give him a task. Then the other half returns, quick as lightning, and when the master is coming to him with his question, Jeus is ready. After this, Jeus will return to his interrupted trip. . . .

In the Wageman family a girl has been born. Long Hendrik is almost crazy with joy. At last he has a girl, now! "Well, you knew it in advance, Jeus," he is saying as he is patting the boy's head.

Jeus cannot come to school fast enough now to tell Gerrit of the great event.

"Now I've got something, Gerrit. If I tell you, you'll let me copy for a whole year?"

"Tell me first." The fat little boy is almost bursting with the desire to know what Jeus may have this time. But Jeus is careful, he wants to make the most of this proposition.

"But then you'll get nothing else for the first few weeks. That should be enough. It's quite something what I'm going to show you. Are you ready?"

"No. First I have to know what it is." Gerrit will not buy a cat in the bag.

With a chuckle Jeus says: "I've a little sister, Gerrit. Now, what do you say to that? Isn't that something? You didn't think it would be that, did you?"

No, Gerrit hadn't thought of that. A little sister, that's really something special. He is wishing so much for a little sister himself, but he is also a good business man. Closing one eye in the Buster Brown fashion he asks his friend:

"Does your girl look as old and wrinkled as the one of Mrs. Bonges?"

"I should say not," cries Jeus who feels that his new little sister has been insulted. "Our little girl is just like an angel, you have to know that, like one of those angels who are flying around Our Good Lord and have palm leaves in their hands."

"I don't believe that," says Gerrit. "Then she must be a saint, and saints are not coming just like that."

"What a blockhead! Always something new," thinks Jeus. However Gerrit is interested in Jeus' offer. "May I see her once? What is her name?"

Jeus' face is clearing up. "Her name is Miets, but you have to wait a while before you can see her. She has to learn to cry first."

This is of course only a little trick of Jeus'; he wants to keep Gerrit for a few weeks in suspension. But at last Gerrit becomes impatient. Jeus is "copying" and he's not getting anything for it,—that's out . . .

"You're lying to me," he says to Jeus. "Babies cry before they're even born. No, the deal's off! You have to give me something or else I'll call it off." But Jeus gets Gerrit so far that he agrees to wait another two weeks. And then one Wednesday at noontime Gerrit may come to look.

"Here's Gerrit, mother,—he wants to look at Miets."

Full of pride Jeus is pointing at his sister. And Miets is lying there, she looks her very best, like the girl she is, she smiles at her visitor and looks at him with wide open eyes.

"This is perhaps a little girl, heh?" Jeus is all smiles. "You have to look into her eyes, it is as if you could see Our Dear Lord Himself, what? And look at her little cheeks and her lips, and the darling little hands,—isn't she an angel?"

No, Gerrit cannot see that. "You're exaggerating,—this child has eyes just like all the other children." And what he is saying then wipes away all of Jeus' big expectations,—there goes a whole year of "copying,"—as Gerrit is saying maliciously:

"And she's wet her bed, too, you can smell it, ha; angels don't smell like that, they have a different smell, and they can also talk, this one can't . . ."

Jeus is stumped. He is standing there, unable to say anything to that. Gerrit's words have caused him actual pain. But then he bursts out:

"Just so that you know it, Gerrit, Miets hasn't got such a big seat as you, and her nose isn't as big as your'n, and she hasn't got any lice, either."

"Do you mean to say that you have no lice?" cries Gerrit, angry now.

"Well, surely not such big ones as you. Your lice are nothing but loafers, and they are getting young ones, too . . ."

Later in the day Jeus is sorry that he has said this. A quarrel with Gerrit is bad for him, it means trouble at home and in school. Therefore he tells Gerrit the following morning that he's sorry. The result is that he has to pay Gerrit two cents and then he can copy again. And then Jeus' worries are beginning again . . .

CHAPTER TWENTY

Sour grapes

THE GRAPES OF MRS. AANSE ARE NOT HANGING ANY MORE where they should. It is not Mrs. Aanse herself who is making this perplexing discovery, but Mother Crisje. As she is going to the chicken coop to feed the chickens she finds someone there who is eating, a circumstance which she thinks is most surprising. It is Bernard who is lying there in the summer sun. But what is he holding in his hands? A large bunch of grapes, and the shiny little berries are disappearing one by one in his mouth!

"What are you eating there, Bernard?"

Quickly the boy is trying to hide the stolen grapes. Mother will not permit any stealing, she's very strict about this, and if father should find out . . .

"Now, will you tell me? What is the answer, Bernard? What are you trying to hide there? Grapes, I can see it!"

Bernard is holding the bunch of grapes at his back. Half of it is already eaten up. Mother is very angry.

"They are from Mrs. Aanse, heh? You bring them back to her this very minute. Come on now, go and apologize."

But Bernard is not very keen on this idea; people whose fruit you have stolen are usually not particularly kind to you. Bernard shakes his head and remains on the ground. That's too much for Mother Crisje. She'll teach him. Now she's pulling the obstinate boy up.

"Don't you want to do what I'm telling you? You runt,

you? Go now, go to Mrs. Aanse. But wait a minute. I think we better go together to Mrs. Aanse, heh?"

Bernard likes this prospect even less . . . while Crisje has gone into the house to take off her apron, the bird has flown and he has not forgotten to take the grapes with him.

"Wait, you'll see something when you'll come home," that's all that Crisje is calling after him.

This has to be settled properly, thinks Crisje. She decides to go over to Mrs. Aanse herself. She lives only two doors away. What shall she do now? thinks Mother Crisje. Shall she tell it to Hendrik? That'll be too bad for Bernard. Or shall she not tell? Children surely are causing a lot of trouble.

Mrs. Aanse doesn't know yet about the theft. In her full width,—she weighs two hundred and fifty pounds—she's sitting there comfortably in the sun.

"Howdy, Aunt Cris. Are you coming to pay me a visit?"

"Yes, but I have bad news, don't you know it yet?"

"What should I know, Aunt Crisje?" A large worry-wrinkle has suddenly appeared on her forehead.

"Your grapes have been stolen . . ."

"My grapes? My grapes, Aunt Crisje? I hope that isn't true?" She is jumping up, but immediately she's sagging back into her chair. "Oh, Aunt Crisje, my feet, they hurt me so, and my legs are as stiff as broomsticks, and so fat,—I can't tell you."

"Wet compresses, Mrs. Aanse . . ."

But Mrs. Aanse is not hearing her any more, she has gotten up and is now looking at her grapes. It is a sad sight for both women, empty branches are grinning into their faces. And on the ground there are some of the grapes,

stepped on and ruined by the thief. The big body of Mrs. Aanse is now shaking with anger.

"Good gracious, Crisje, my grapes! Why, if I get a hold of that thief, I'll break his bones. Every year it's the same thing, Crisje. Those brats are always after my grapes. Not even once have I been able to get any for myself. Isn't it a scandal? And do you know who has done it? He ought to be be skinned alive, he ought to be branded with a hot iron, heh? Oh, if I ever catch him, I'll break his neck, Crisje."

Crisje has to come out with it now, she has heard enough of Mrs. Aanse's threats. She is looking now at Mrs. Aanse's arms, they are hefty and strong like a wrestler's.

"My Bernard has done it. You . . ." she is adding quickly in order to make the big woman calm down, "you only have to tell me what they are worth and I'll gladly pay you."

Now the whole situation has changed. Crisje is no longer the friendly peasant woman who has come to Mrs. Aanse to sympathize with her, she's now the mother of such a little rascal and scamp as Bernard! She puts her hands on her hips, Mrs. Aanse, and after taking a deep breath, she lets go at Crisje:

"Why, did you think, perchance, that I would let it go at that? I'll go to the guards with this! You'll have to settle with them. I have nothing to do with it any more. That Bernard of yours, he's a ne'er-do-well, he'll wind up on the gallows, if you don't watch out! You're much too good to your boys. And that Hendrik of yours, he ought to pay more attention to his children, beat them up more instead of singing all day long. If it were I, I'd break their ribs, as

true as I'm standing here." There, now, Mrs. Aanse's got it out of her system now. She's taking a deep breath.

But Crisje's legs are trembling. "Not the guards," she thinks. "No, not that."

"Don't do that now, Mrs. Aanse. Think of me. I shall pay you for the grapes, as much as you want, but don't do that, Mrs. Aanse, I don't want my boy to be locked up."

The fat woman is throwing her arms up into the air. "My grapes, they can't be paid for, they're growing there in order to be eaten, and by me, too, and not by that no-good boy of your'n."

Crisje can see that it is better for her to go now. The angry woman is only getting more furious by the minute. That boy Bernard and his tricks! If Mrs. Aanse does what she has threatened, he'll find himself in jail yet. Crisje doesn't know what to do.

And the hours are passing by and Bernard is not showing up. What was that noise? The sound of horses on the gravel road. Crisje is putting her hand upon her heart; the guards are coming to take her boy away! But now she's not hearing the sound any more.

Any minute now Long Hendrik may come home, and Bernard is still out. Jan Kniep has already gone up and down the gravel road several times to look for him.

"Haven't you seen Bernard, Jeus?"

"No, mother."

"Where have you been, then?"

"I was at Hosman's, mother, I've been helping Gerrit with the feeding." Mother is turning around.

"Is there anything wrong with Bernard? Why are you crying, mother?"

"He stole the grapes of Mrs. Aanse, and now she's going to the guards."

As Hendrik is coming home, Crisje doesn't have to hide anything from him. Her tear-stained face is showing him at once that there's something wrong.

"What's the matter, Crisje? Have you been crying? Come on, tell us what it is." After he has heard the story, Hendrik is furious.

"Where is the snoutnose?"

"I don't know, Hendrik,—but you won't punish him too hard, will you?" begs Mother Crisje.

"You just leave that to me."

Mother is already clearing off the table and Bernard has not shown up yet. Father is getting angrier by the minute. The children are very quiet and scared. Not one of them would want to be in Bernard's shoes. Suddenly father has an idea. He goes to the hallway, opens the cellar door and calls down:

"Are you there, Bernard?"

A soft, timid noise is the answer. Voluntarily Bernard has crawled into the cellar, hoping that this would soften father's wrath so that he will not punish him so severely now.

"Come out of there, come, come, and make it snappy."

On his hands and knees Bernard is crawling upstairs. Then he feels father's big hand on his neck and he's lifted up into the air.

"Here we have our wonder-boy, Cris, our thief." He's taking the boy between his knees.

"And now confess, you bad boy, and tell the truth, or I'll turn your neck around."

Coughing and stuttering Bernard is telling about his

misdeed. He is not even looking at father. Father reprimands him severely:

"If you ever should get it into your head to steal, well, then there won't be much left of you, understand?"

"Yes, father." Under father's severe eyes Bernard will promise anything.

"Will you ever steal again?"

"No, father."

Crisje and the children are already thinking that Bernard is getting off easy tonight. But Bernard himself is not so sure of it. First he has to get out from between father's knees. Well, a second later he knows. Father's mouth has done its share, now father's hands are stepping in, and they're hard. Bernard feels himself lifted up. Father is pulling his little pants taut. It is a good, sound spanking with which Bernard is paying for his sin. Mother cannot look on any longer.

"My God, Hendrik, stop it now, you're killing him. Even the guards would not beat him that much." But Long Hendrik does not hear her. He is busy to beat once and for all the deviltry out of his son. And Bernard cries blood and murder; those grapes were expensive, very expensive! At last Hendrik is finished. He puts the boy down and says: "And now to bed, without supper. And make it quick, before I'll give you some more of this."

Mother Crisje is bringing the sinner to bed. She is crying herself now. Hendrik was too severe. Jan thinks so too, but of course he doesn't want to meddle.

Mother is undressing the boy. "Now you won't steal any more, will you promise me that? Come, say something, answer your mother, Bernard."

But Bernard is saying nothing. He's biting his lips and

crawls under the covers. Mother is putting the other children to bed, too. She has to talk with Hendrik.

"You must not do that any more, Hendrik. I thought that you were killing him."

"I'll beat the thievery out of him, Crisje."

"But you can also go too far, Hendrik, see? That's no good, either. Then you'll lose all his respect."

After this Crisje is very busy in the kitchen. She is going through the closet and quickly hiding something now and then under her apron. But Long Hendrik has seen it, he jumps up and says:

"What did I say, Crisje? To bed without supper. Put that bread back." The tears are coming into Mother Crisje's eyes now that she cannot do what her heart is commanding her to do.

"That's not the right way, either, Hendrik, to send him to bed without food. Our Dear Lord doesn't punish one crime three times over. First the cellar, then a beating, and now to bed without supper! That's too much, that's devil's work."

"Do you mean to tell me that I don't know what I'm doing? You'll see how much trouble he'll give us yet."

"May I give him then just one slice of bread, Hendrik?"

"No, nothing doing! We have to cooperate and not work against each other. That's bad. Tomorrow you can give him as much as you like. But nothing tonight. He'll not starve to death from that."

No, Bernard is not starving. He has been lying quietly, listening until everybody is in bed and asleep. Then he slides softly out of his bed. He is now sleeping with his brother Jan together, until father will have finished that

new room for Jan in the attic. Jan hears Bernard rustling in his straw tick. "What are you doing there?" he asks.

"Hold your mouth, nitwit, or I'll shut it for you."

A little later Jan can hear Bernard eating something. "What're you eating there?"

"Don't talk so loud, numskull. Do you want daddy to kill me? If you keep quiet now, I'll have something good for you."

"Something good?" asks Jan, very much interested.

"Yes, apples and pears. Also sweet plums, but they are hidden all the way down near the foot-end."

"I have to say, Bernard, you have a lot of nerve!"

"If you only will talk softly, Jan. Do you want a good, sour apple?"

With great relish the children are eating the fruit.

"We are really lying here on a bed of pears and apples. Can't mother find them when she's making up the bed in the morning?"

"No, she does not even suspect it. The fruits are in the straw, and mother doesn't touch the straw."

"But don't the mice eat your pears and apples?"

"I don't leave them there that long."

"Why not?"

Jan's questions are a little bit too much for Bernard. Impatiently he says:

"Go to sleep, you nitwit. You should use your eyes a little more. You sleep at daytime. You ought to sleep at nights."

Long Hendrik has hardly left the house the following morning when Mother Crisje is coming into Bernard's bedroom with three oversize sandwiches. Bernard has a

wonderful stomach; the sandwiches are good after all that fruit of the night.

"Will you now not make any more trouble for mother, Bernard?"

With a full mouth Bernard promises to be more careful next time.

"Does it still hurt you, my boy?"

"No, mother, I can't feel anything any more."

"Let me look." Crisje is lifting his little shirt. "My heavens, my God!" Crisje's tears are streaming down her cheeks. Oh, Hendrik should not have done that. Bernard's whole backside is black and blue. Crisje runs away and returns with a wet cloth. But Bernard doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

"That cloth stays on, and you'll have to stay in bed all day today."

"But I feel nothing, mother, nothing at all. I don't know why you should bother so."

"Do you really feel nothing, Bernard?" Mother Crisje cannot understand it. "Well, you ought to know it yourself, but your whole backside is black and blue." Shaking her head she goes back to the kitchen.

Is his backside really so blue? Bernard wants to know.

"Look at my backside, Jan, and tell me."

The little shirt goes up again. Jan bursts into a laugh.

"It looks just like one of those masks that the people put on when they go to a mummery." Bernard cannot believe it. He goes to the mirror and, standing on a chair, he looks for himself.

"Dammit," says he as he sees the many-colored picture which he has to carry around with him now. "How dad

has trimmed me! He surely did a full job, heh? But I have no pain, see? If father only knew that, ha, ha."

Mother wants Bernard to go to Mrs. Aanse to apologize. After this, she tells him, he has to come right back. Bernard sees that he can't get away from it. With leaden feet he shuffles towards the fat woman's house. He finds her in her yard, the big woman, where she's feeding the chickens.

"Mrs. Aanse," says the boy softly and looks at her big strong arms. How stupid of me, thinks he, to steal grapes here,—if he gets into her hands, there's no telling. . . .

"Mrs. Aanse," he says again. Now she hears him and turns around. A flood of words is going over the boy, the woman is scolding him, accusing him while he stands there as if he were nailed to the ground. Then she grabs him and boxes his ears and Bernard screams like a pig that has been stuck. "Ouch, ouch, Mrs. Aanse, be careful of my backside." The big woman is taking a breath. "Of what, did you say?" "Of my backside, Mrs. Aanse. My father beat it black and blue. You have to see it."

And quickly Bernard lets his pants down, lifts his shirt and shows his colorful buttocks. The woman is bending down. She looks. At last she says:

"By golly, he surely gave you a beating!" She has actually pity for the boy. She is also ashamed as she sees the little boy in this position, his seat turned towards her and his little hands holding up his shirt. Then she thinks what the people may say if they might see her thus and she orders Bernard to pull his pants up again. She's still prudish, at her age, Mrs. Aanse is.

"Button your pants now, Bernard, and never get it into your head to steal my grapes again."

Bernard is very happy now. The guards are not getting

him this time. Gratefully he looks up to Mrs. Aanse. But as she's asking him if he wants a glass of lemonade, he can hardly believe it. At the same time he does not trust her. Is it a trick? Why should she be so friendly all of a sudden? He decides to be careful and plays his role further, that of a well-bred, courteous little boy. Yes, Mrs. Aanse, no, Mrs. Aanse, of course, Mrs. Aanse, if I may say so, Mrs. Aanse, your Teet, Mrs. Aanse, that's one in a thousand, I've said that all the time, Mrs. Aanse. No, Mrs. Aanse, Teet would never steal. It's beautiful here, Mrs. Aanse, much more beautiful than at home!

And Mrs. Aanse thinks what a nice, darling little boy Bernard is. And Bernard thinks what an easy mark she is, this Mrs. Aanse, you can tell her anything, she swallows it hook, line and sinker. And when he is sipping the lemonade she is giving him, all his doubts about the big woman have disappeared.

"Now I'll have to go home again, I have to help mother."

"Then hurry up and run," says the fat woman with a friendly smile.

"May I come again, Mrs. Aanse?"

Mrs. Aanse is smiling again: "Of course, Bernard." But immediately he adds: "And are you still mad at me, Mrs. Aanse?" Now the woman is thinking again of her stolen grapes. The old anger is coming up again. She is looking at Bernard and at his little hands that are holding his beaten backside. Then she says: "No, Bernard, no, I'll forgive you, everything is forgotten. But don't you do that again, or I'll break your bones."

Mother is already looking for Bernard. What may that hefty woman have done to her boy?

"So, there you are again, Bernard. And what did Mrs. Aanse say?"

"I had a glass of lemonade with her, and we've talked together for a while," answers Bernard as if he had been on a birthday visit.

"What? You've had lemonade? But . . ."

Bernard interrupts her: "Do you still have to go to the yard, mother?"

"Yes," says Crisje who is still under the influence of her surprise. How could the snottose have been able to turn the furious woman into a friendly person who had offered him lemonade? Then she continues:

"In the yard, yes, as soon as I'll have fed the pigs."

"I wanted to help you," said the boy simply.

It warms Mother Crisje's heart. She pulls her boy towards her and kisses him. Then she whispers into his ear: "Do not steal any more."

Bernard goes to his bed. Mother is not going to disturb him now for a while, he knows. He takes all the apples and pears and plums out of his straw tick and brings them to the attic. Three times he has to go up and down, then everything is safely hidden and stowed away. Now Jan may go and look for the fruit in his straw tick. . . .

After this Bernard goes outside to look for Jeus.

"Jeus," says Bernard, "do you know if Hosman's Hector is a bad dog?"

"Yes," says Jeus, "he's a bad one." He looks at his brother with a suspicious eye. "Do you want to pick the pear tree empty?" But Bernard does not even answer. He only asks; "How many pears are still on that tree?"

"I don't know that."

"Then you have to go and count them! Jan Hosman

says that they have pears as big as this," and he indicates with his hands the size of a child's head. "And Hector has to watch the pear tree, and Hector is a bloodhound. But I'll get the pears, don't you worry."

"Have you no pains any more?" Jeus means to remind Bernard of the fate that is awaiting those that steal fruit. And Bernard understands at once. He says curtly: "That's none of your business; that's long forgotten."

"How about the guards, Bernard?" Jeus is trying to scare his brother. But Bernard cannot be scared, he's obstinate.

"Aw, those,—" says he. "Mrs. Aanse is crazy and her grapes are all sour, anyway. I don't want them any more. Will you count the pears at Hosman's?" Later that day Jeus is sauntering into the farmyard of Mr. Hosman. Near the stables he finds Gerrit.

"Are you feeding the pigs, Gerrit?"

"No, they've been fed already. I have to work in the garden now."

"May I go with you?"

"All right, then take that basket along."

A dog suddenly barks furiously at them. "Quiet, Hector, that's Jeus, good people." Jeus stops. He is looking at the growling animal. What a snout! He wouldn't want to get his hand into that mouth! And that's where Bernard wants to steal pears? Jeus appraises the dog and he can feel that he may take the chance of approaching the animal. "Ah, Hector," says he with the sweetest voice possible. "What a nice dog you are. Hector,—" and without fear he walks towards the big beast. Now he is standing in front of the dog and pats his head, saying nice, soothing words all the time. The animal is sniffing at him and gradually losing

his suspicion so that at last he is actually licking Jeus' hands.

"Now you can do with him as you please, Jeus," says Gerrit. "Otherwise he would have bitten your neck off long ago."

"Why do you keep him here, then?" asks Jeus a little later, as Gerrit has already forgotten about the dog.

"He has to watch the pears, Jeus. Look over there what big pears there are hanging on that little bit of a tree."

As Gerrit is doing his work, Jeus is counting the pears. In the evening he can report to Bernard that there are twenty-four large pears on the little tree and that he has made friends with Hector the dog so that he doesn't have to be afraid of him. Bernard winks with one eye. He knows enough . . .

It does not happen very often that there is fruit on Mother Crisje's table. Fruit is expensive and the farmers would rather sell it to the city. And those farmers who are raising any fruit are forced to have their property watched day and night against orchard thieves and apple snitchers. Bernard is one of the worst robbers in this field. He doesn't consider it evil to take fruit wherever it grows, therefore he doesn't have to bother about a bad conscience. He looks at this activity as an interesting game and his wild nature enjoys the dangers that are connected with it. He is never without apples or pears. Now that Jan, and later Gerrit have found him out, his stock is not safe any more from the inroads of his brothers who are constantly searching the house for Bernard's secret hiding places, so that Bernard has to establish new caches every day. Especially Gerrit who himself is too lazy to climb a tree, is haunting Bernard. At last he contrives to catch Bernard in his trap.

Just as he is busy to hide a new supply of fruit in the straw above the pigs' pen, Gerrit is popping up. If Bernard won't let him partake of the fruit every day, he threatens to tell father and mother everything. And Bernard, who knows that he would really carry out his threat, agrees. And every day the extortioner demands a larger share and Bernard can do nothing but give in. Thus there is always the danger present for Bernard that father will find out some day. This is the situation today when he is planning his biggest haul.

He has sworn to himself that Hosman's pears shall be for him exclusively this year. He has not forgotten what had happened last year at the time when the pears were ripe. It is as if it had happened only yesterday. He had met Jan and Piet Hosman, each one with a large pear in his hand. The water had run out of his mouth, but do you think that they would have given him a bite? No, not even as he asked them very politely. "Nothing doing," Jan had said. "They're much too good for you." And Piet had added: "Why don't you buy some, if you have money?" And then they had smacked their lips to tease him. "You wait," Bernard had sworn to himself. "There will be new pears, next year, but then they will be for me, ha."

His plans were made. First of all he had to become good friends with Gerrit the hired man and after that with Hector the dog. He would win the bloodhound over with the aid of a piece of sausage. There is not a day now that he isn't around Gerrit.

"Do you know why the cows always have such slime coming from their mouths, Gerrit?"

"Why, don't you know that, Bernard?"

"I've forgotten this altogether, Gerrit, and now we have

to know in school . . .” With such and other little stories he is following the hired man, trying in this way to get near Hector. And one day he’s lucky. He is close to Hector and gives him a piece of sausage.

“I want to try if Hector would bite me, Gerrit,” but just then farmer Hosman is coming and chases the boy away. He has his suspicions, the farmer. After begging his mother for a long time Bernard has been able to get from her the job to go every morning to the Hosmans’ farm for the milk. Formerly Crisje had not been able to make him do that by any means, neither by friendly words nor by spankings.

One nice morning Mrs. Hosman herself is giving him the milk. Bernard sees his opportunity. “May I please go to Hector for a minute, Mrs. Hosman? Jeus says that Hector would not bite him and I want to find out if he’ll bite me, then? Please, Mrs. Hosman?” But Mrs. Hosman won’t let him; she does not trust him, she knows Bernard’s reputation.

The next day he is getting the milk from Minny Hosman. This time he tries it a different way.

“You have such beautiful animals, Minny. You’re rich, very rich, heh? And what a big house you have. Boy, when I grow up I want to become a farmer too. And then I’ll want a dog, too, just as your Hector. May I pet him a bit, if you don’t mind?” Minny cannot resist so much friendliness and flattery. Resolutely Bernard steps up to the gigantic dog. The animal is wagging his tail and this encourages the boy. The dog eats the sausage out of Bernard’s hand and he permits him to pet his neck and back. That night Bernard decides to take his chance. Father is not home; today, tomorrow and Sunday he’s with his quartet

in Wesel. On this trip he and Jan did not have to come along.

As Bernard has convinced himself that everybody in the house is asleep, he slips noiselessly outside. The weather is favorable, it is dark and a little rain is falling. He runs a stretch on the road that leads to Stokkum, goes through the "drill-hole," then up-hill and now he has arrived at his goal. Bernard is very familiar with the situation here. He climbs over the fencing, drops into the grass and on hands and knees he crawls in the general direction of the little tree. Hector has heard the noise. Right in front of the boy there looms the big, raw body of the dog. This is the critical moment. His heart beats, but he remains calm. "Hector," he calls softly, and the dog snarls, but he's not yet barking. "Hector, good people. Hector, here." The dog recognizes him and he swallows the piece of sausage which Bernard is throwing to him. And now he goes quickly to work. He shakes the tree so that the pears are falling into the grass. And while he is talking softly with the dog and throwing him a piece of sausage now and then, he is picking up the pears and stuffing them under his blouse and jacket, and into his pockets. Then he makes a quick get-away.

Hector, who seems to sense that everything isn't as it should be, starts to bark violently but Bernard is already across the fence. Carefully he makes his way back home. For the time being he buries the pears in the garden. The following morning he goes over to the Hosmans' farm to get milk. He acts as if nothing had happened. The entire Hosman family is awaiting him already and they all are looking at him in an ugly way; only in the eyes of Gerrit

he can discern some friendly gleam. Bernard acts his role well:

"Good morning, everybody; may I have two quarts of milk?" The big farmer stands straight in front of the little boy.

"Do you know anything?" he is asking him gruffly.

Bernard is talking against the belly of the big man, that's how close he's standing to him. "What should I know?" says he.

"Do you know anything about our pears?" There is a threatening tone in the voice of the farmer. But Bernard is sure of himself. As sure as he is of his pears. "I know nothing," he says calmly. He steps a little back and looks into the small, penetrating eyes of the farmer. "Have your pears been stolen? And Hector,—what have you got him for?"

In the end, the farmer has to let the boy go. After all, mere suspicions are not enough. He has to have proof. Later he speaks with Mother Crisje about it but she can honestly say that she doesn't know anything about it. She says that it couldn't have been Bernard for she herself had brought him to bed that evening. Then farmer Hosman begins to search for the thief in a different direction.

As soon as Bernard is coming home, Mother Crisje questions him thoroughly about the pears, but he claims that he knows nothing whatsoever about it. Father would be willing to pay a quarter to know who it was that played this trick on farmer Hosman. The entire neighborhood is making fun of the case, but no matter how he questions his son Bernard, it is impossible to get anything out of him. Bernard would surely not take his father into his

confidence after the beating he had given him that last time.

But a few days later Crisje makes a discovery. She is coming in from the kitchen with a tiny end of sausage.

"Who has eaten my sausage?"

"I, mother, I was so hungry yesterday." Bernard is saying this. But as father tries to connect the sausage with the theft of the pears, the boy only shrugs his shoulders.

And then one morning mother has to get some straw for the pigs. She reaches up to the sheaves high over the pigsty. Suddenly, to her great terror, all kinds of fruit begin to rain down upon her head: apples, pears, plums, yes, even peaches are coming down. "There's no end to it, there's no end to it," moans Mother Crisje. Now Bernard's fruit supply is known to the whole family. Unwillingly he helps to pick up all the fruit. All that is, of course, lost for him now; "stolen goods" may not remain in this household. And for tonight there looms another engagement with father's hands.

"How much trouble that boy is causing us," sighs Mother Crisje as she is reporting everything to Long Hendrik.

"Just let him come," says Hendrik.

Crisje is standing before her Long Hendrik: "But you must not beat him any more like that, or I'll run away myself, hear?"

Long Hendrik has enough respect for Crisje. "I shall not do that, Cris," says he.

And now the sinner is standing before him.

"What shall I do with you, Bernard?"

"Just beat me to death, father."

"Did you hear that, Cris?" And then to Bernard:

"Tell me now, my boy—did you steal the pears of farmer Hosman, too?"

Bernard is looking from his father to his mother.

"If you confess now honestly and if you promise never to steal again, then I shall not punish you any further."

"Can I count on that, father?"

"Here's my hand."

The boy places his hand in that of his father. Then he says:

"Yes, I did it. Last year they made our mouths water and wouldn't even give us a bite, so I decided that this year I had to have them and now I do have them!"

Bernard has to tell his father now the whole story. As he is telling of the moment when the bloodhound appeared, that one second when it was to be decided whether the animal was to tear him to pieces or not, Long Hendrik's eyes begin to water. For the first time it is becoming clear to Long Hendrik that his boy is not naturally inclined to be a thief, but that it is his inclination towards adventures which makes him do these things, an inclination born out of surplus strength, daring and temperament. And Mother Crisje is asking herself how this child will ever be tamed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

*"Let the little ones come unto
Me . . ."*

GERRIT NOESTHEDE ONCE SAID TO LONG HENDRIK THAT he should not worry too much about Jeus' poor school work. He said that he had heard of many great inventors and other smart people who had not been good students in their school days. Hendrik is very happy to hear this; maybe his Jeus has still a chance to become a priest? New and bright plans for the future are springing up in Hendrik's head.

But Jeus' attitude towards his catechism seems to endanger his future priesthood very much. True, while he was being prepared for his first Holy Communion he was doing fairly well. But as he became older his devoted attention towards things holy changed, and more often than not, he was not even listening when Father Reenen was explaining the articles of faith. And now he has the habit of interrupting the priest with questions of his own, questions which are often perplexing to the priest so that he is staring at Jeus in bewilderment: These are not the kind of questions which a child would ask! He doesn't know this child any more, Father Reenen, he cannot understand any more what it is that is going on in his little head. Yet, he shall never forget that day when Jeus made him so happy,

the "day of the miracle" as he likes to call it in gratitude and reverence.

Later on Jeus' religious lessons are taken over by the chaplain. It seems that here an open conflict is inevitable for Jeus' attitude is not changed and the chaplain cannot finish one lesson without Jeus having caused some trouble or other. During the course of teaching the poor chaplain only has to ask the children if everything is now clear to them, and Jeus will cry "no" while all the other children cry "yes."

The chaplain declines to discuss fundamental matters of the faith, even with grown-ups he would do that only in exceptional cases, but certainly not with a child of nine years, and he tells Jeus in no uncertain words. And one day it comes to a show-down.

The chaplain has been teaching about eternal damnation. As he is asking if everybody has understood this, Jeus stands up in his bench. And with a flood of words he begins to explain to the chaplain why he cannot believe, now and never, that a God for Whom love is the highest of virtues, should condemn His own child forevermore for something he has done during his short little life on earth!

The chaplain listens with an open mouth, he cannot believe his ears. This is not a child speaking! It is the question whether Jeus himself knows the meaning of the words which are coming from his mouth. The children are turning around in the classroom, there is a murmur and the chaplain goes into action. He will not permit a child to speak such heresies in his class; he flies towards the boy and beats him around his ears. Then he drags him out of the bench and into the corner. White with rage, he then

runs to his desk and starts to pray the Lord's Prayer. But Jeus is hardly out of the chaplain's hands when he jumps on top of a bench so that all the children can see him and says with a voice which is obviously not his own:

"Christ said: 'Let the little ones come unto Me.' Christ did not beat the children, He tried to understand them, for He loved everything that lives."

A deadly silence has fallen over the classroom. As Jeus is coming back to reality he suddenly sees the astonished eyes of the children. What is he doing on this bench? And how is it that his head is hurting him so and that his arms and legs are trembling? But then his ears are catching the word which is coming from the lips of the chaplain and which sounds so harsh and intolerant:

"He's obsessed, this boy, a demoniac . . ."

And this word he has to hear again as he has to go to Father Reenen with his father. What the exact meaning is he doesn't know, and the face of his father seems to indicate that he doesn't know it either.

But as Long Hendrik is repeating the terrible word to Crisje that evening, he says:

"Well, if my boy is obsessed, then he is obsessed too. But I shall go and tell this Father Reenen something! Now I think that he ought to know everything."

And it takes her a whole week to tell Father Reenen "everything." Evening after evening she's going to the rectory. She is telling about the rattle in the cradle and the wreath, how the cradle was rocking one day all by itself. And as she is mentioning the silence, Father Reenen knows very well what she means. And she tells how the little child could look right down into the very souls of grown-up people and how he foretold things which later

on actually came to pass, all the great and little things that happened around Jeus.

And as the two churchmen have heard everything, they are quiet and apprehensive through the power of those strange and inexplicable events that have happened with Jeus. At last Father Reenen says:

"There are a great many miracles and strange things under the roof of Our Dear Lord. What you are telling us here certainly is unusual, something that does not happen to many people, and it is possible, all this, for we human beings don't know everything yet . . ."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Children and dreams

MOTHER CRISJE IS AGAIN FEARFUL OF THE HAPPINESS that is living under her roof. She who has been looking so often into the hearts and houses of others, of those who had been asking her help and advice, she knows how fickle Lady Luck can be.

This happiness! Crisje feels it mostly in the evening, after dark when the lamps are lit.

Sitting quietly in her corner she's listening to the discussions of the others. Jan has just been telling another story about his adventures in the Far East, and as he is finished, the men are packing their pipes anew and now Hendrik is telling one.

He is meeting so many people every day that he has always something to tell. He is now speaking about Casje whom he has met recently. He has seen him in Jan van Blawieck's house who is a lathehand in the brushfactory. Casje, father is saying, has come back from Limburg and Belgium to look up his old neighborhood. Pretty soon he shall be dropping in on Crisje, too. Little Gerrit wants to know who Casje is; he has never yet heard about him. Mother tells him that Casje is a merchant, even taller than daddy, but that he has no arms.

"No arms?" cries Gerrit in surprise. Father notices the serious expression in the child's face and therefore he begins quickly with his story. In Long Hendrik's eyes there

is a smile as he goes on telling how Casje has told him about a talk between Father Reenen and Jan Drup, the teamster. The priest was just passing by when Jan Drup was whipping his horses. The priest looked up from his prayer book and said reproachfully to him: "Jan Drup, I'd rather be your rosary than your horse." And Jan Drup answered with a loud laugh: "I wouldn't say that, Father Reenen, my rosary has been hanging on a nail now for a whole year . . ."

Father laughed about his own joke. The children who are allowed to stay up a little longer this evening, are sitting around the table, their heads on their hands, Jan, Bernard, Jeus, Gerrit and little Hendrik. The light from the table lamp is shining in their eyes and they enjoy the merry spirit that is conjured up by the stories of Jan and father.

Crisje is listening to Miets who is lying in the cradle. Sometimes she is twisting her body a little as she feels the awakening life within her. Now and then her eyes meet those of Long Hendrik and he looks at her as if he wanted to say: "Well, Cris, aren't we lucky people?" Mostly he is now talking about his plans for the future. With pride he is looking at his children. They shall learn to sing and play the violin, just as Jan, his oldest boy is already doing, and they'll have a piano, sure-fire, they'll have one. Yes, father knows it well, he wants everyone to know it too.

To listen to him one would think that life is going according to a well-defined plan, established and sanctioned by him, Long Hendrik, and in which he will not permit the slightest change. And the facts seem to prove that he is right. He himself is working full time, Jan is already earning nicely and Bernard is going to, pretty soon. Jeus

may be not exceptional in school but he has been promoted again, he's in the fifth year now. Gerrit, Hendrik and Miets are growing nicely, and Crisje is all right now, too. You wouldn't think that she's expecting already her seventh child. No, the doctor will not become rich from his family. Jan's sore has remained closed so far—in short, fortune seems to be smiling on him and his house. Mother Crisje is happy about it all, but she doesn't trust this happiness altogether.

Lady Luck—is she insulted by these doubts?—Well, whatever the reason may be, she suddenly turns her back on the happy family.

Anton—"Teun"—has been born. Jan's ailment is beginning to give trouble again; it breaks open. The stench is unbearable, but Crisje never tires in giving him her best care. But all her care is in vain. One day Our Dear Lord is taking Jan away. Then Jan's sister shows up suddenly. She takes all his belongings and the body, and the little room in Crisje's attic is empty now.

What is it that is making Crisje's face so serious now so that she is hardly seen laughing any more?

Jan's death has somehow given her the feeling that misfortune never comes alone, that more trouble is coming and that the house is open now for misery and sorrow. Of course, Crisje is trying to control herself. What has happened to her self-confidence? She is giving a nice example to the others! But she cannot get rid of this feeling, it follows her wherever she goes. She's talking to Hendrik about it and he kisses her and laughs at her sorrowful thoughts. "Imagination," says he, "she has worked too hard these last days." Is it imagination? Maybe Long Hendrik is right, for nothing serious has happened so far.

Life is going on in its easy and pleasant way. At six in the morning the workers are getting up, Mother Crisje at half past five. Then she is busy, the sandwiches have to be big and good, for these fellows are good eaters, Hendrik and the boys. Usually Jan is already finished with his breakfast when daddy and Bernard are only beginning. On the minute Jan leaves the house, he doesn't have to run for the steam car; but father and Bernard are having a race every morning: On the sign of the train whistle they start, usually with their sandwiches still in their hands: the long legs of father and the youth of Bernard against the haste of the steam car. And mother and Jeus remain standing in the door looking after the runners . . .

Tomorrow she's going to wake them a little earlier, mother thinks, but she knows that it won't help much—these two just have to have their race in the morning.

Crisje has to think of last night. Again, as so often since he's going to work, Bernard had been sent to the cellar for punishment. What does he do, the rascal? To save the money for himself he sells his train ticket, and, instead of riding inside of the car, he hangs on from the outside and risks his life! Together with some other never-do-wells he runs after the train and as soon as they come across the borderline into Germany he hangs on. He calls it an interesting game which brings money to boot. When "Long-Nose" Jan the conductor comes, they jump off, hold on to the car with their hands and run after, but as soon as Jan is gone, they jump on again. In this Bernard is incorrigible, no matter how severely Long Hendrik is punishing him. When they come to the train, Hendrik is trying to hold him, to force him onto the car, but he always finds a way

to escape. No wonder that mother gets all excited when they're late a few minutes in the evening!

Tonight Crisje has been running at least a dozen times to the door to look out for Long Hendrik and Bernard. Where can they be? If something has happened to Bernard! Crisje is wringing her hands. She's been feeling that something is going to happen. If she only is wrong! In her thoughts she is following the train. Long Hendrik is of course busy talking to the fellow passengers. Not far from him there is Jan, sleeping. But where is Bernard? My God, her eyes are going over all the faces in the car, but he is not there. Should he again have . . . She doesn't dare to look. Then she gathers all her courage and sees—there, behind the car, there hangs something of herself, a reckless, stupid little fellow whom she has carried under her



heart for nine long months, and she screams: "Bernard," and little Hendrik and Miets are looking at her in fright.

Is she now seeing all this really? Is it only imagination caused by her fear? As Long Hendrik and the boy are coming home a little later they find Crisje lying on her bed, crying heart-breakingly. Something is going to happen, she knows it now for sure, something terrible and she is powerless, she cannot prevent it! This fear is like a strong grip on her throat so that she cannot utter a word, cannot answer Hendrik who is bending over her anxiously. But

as she can speak again she implores Bernard not to do this terrible thing again. He promises and it helps for a week. And Crisje is becoming somewhat calmer.

But one morning her fear is coming back, greater, more terrible than ever before. She does not want to leave her bed, and that has never yet happened to Crisje. She feels heavy as lead, wants to hide her head under the covers, hold Hendrik's hand and listen to his calm, regular breath: Don't get up, somewhere in the house there is that big, dangerous thing which is threatening her, whose nearness she has been sensing all these days.

But the clock does not care for human feelings, it goes on, showing minute after minute without mercy.

Trembling Crisje is stepping upon the cold floor. She'll light the fire so that the chill will go out of the house. A half hour later the house is full of life, and another half hour and she's standing at the door to wave good-bye to Hendrik and Jan. Bernard is the last to leave, the steam car has been whistling twice already.

Her heart is beating so strangely this morning; every once in a while Crisje has to sit down. There's a lot to clear up before the little ones are getting up, but she's not moving a hand. It is as if she were waiting for something. Jeus is probably still asleep, or else he would be downstairs already. This, too, is causing her fear, it is so unusual.

Somebody is knocking. Mother Crisje is standing up straight. The inevitable has happened, that which she has been expecting for months. She knows it. "Come in." It is Mrs. Einders who is standing in the door; roughly she says:

"Cris, Cris. Your son has been run over. Both his legs are off."

Mother Crisje faints. The walls are sinking, the house is

coming down. Where is she now? Then she knows: She's walking on the wide path where she's been walking once with Hendrik. It is beautiful to breathe in this calm; she wants to walk here for the rest of her life. And then she hears a voice, and she believes that it is the voice of St. Peter. He is saying:

"The cup isn't empty yet. You must go back and drink the rest. You know what Our Dear Lord did in Gethsemane?" And Crisje understands what the voice means. She says simply: "I know. I'm back already."

Jeus is rushing out of his bed. He has heard the words which Mrs. Einders has uttered so rudely.

"She could have said that differently," it goes through his mind. "The gossip!" He runs up to her and pummels her face with his fists, making her run out of the door. "That's for your message, you . . ."

He is bending over Crisje. "Mother, mother!" he is crying, and at last she's opening her eyes. "I'll go and see for myself. It isn't as bad as that, I have seen it happen in my dreams beforehand!" And with these words Jeus is showing for the first time that he has known about the accident before it happened.

"Cris, both his legs are off!"—"Mother, it isn't as bad as that!" But how bad is it then? Crisje falls back into a faint.

Jeus is running up the gravel road, he's in a hurry, he's careless and stumbles over a little post that is sticking out of the ground, he falls on his knee. But he's up already. Bernard needs him. Already from afar he sees the crowd. As he comes nearer he sees that they have placed Bernard on a ladder and are carrying him into a house. Because he is the brother he may go inside, too. Bernard is placed

upon a table and Jeus feels a terrible big lump in his throat as he is looking at his unfortunate brother; he is seeing a large wound with clotted blood, the place where the leg was cut off by the wheel. And under the table there is a shoe, and in this shoe there is still Bernard's foot. . . .

Bernard is still conscious. He is calling for his mother. As he sees Jeus among all these strange faces he says, while he is still trying to smile: "Jeus—go and tell mother that I'm all right." This morning near the churchyard he had been trying to jump on the running board of the train, but he had slipped. His leg came under the wheel and a piece was cut off. About ten yards the car had dragged him, but the strong little fellow had still been able to crawl back to the cemetery. Fortunately he was soon found there. Father and Jan who had been sitting in the train had been unaware of the accident, but in the meantime someone had informed Long Hendrik.

"I'm going to mother now," says Jeus to Bernard. Alone, on the way home he can cry at last. But as he comes to the house, he dries his tears; mother must not see him crying. Crisje is sitting in her chair, Aunt Trui and a few neighbors' women are with her.

"Jeus?"

"He lives, there's a piece off his left leg, that's all."

The mother wants to go and see her child, but Jeus recalls what he has seen just a few minutes ago and holds her back:

"Father is coming here soon, he's already with Bernard."

They are waiting for father. Jeus feels now a stabbing pain in his knee. There is dried blood on his stocking. Crisje sees the pain in his face, she soaks the stocking so

that it comes off and then she tends to the wound. Jeus does not whimper, he thinks of Bernards plight and how much pain he has to suffer. And at the same time he makes mother feel a little better by saying that Bernard is not going to die and that he shall be able to run around again. Bernard will become a tailor and make a pair of pants for Jeus then, pants with two pockets, too.

And just as mother is saying again that she cannot wait any longer, that she has to go and see Bernard, Big Long Hendrik is coming into the room. He is not the happy, easy-going Hendrik any more who left the house this morning in such good spirits. While he had been sitting quietly in the railroad car, talking with the fellows, the same car had gone over his child and cut a piece of his leg off! Had made a cripple of him for life! And the long fellow who had always been able to cry on occasion finds it impossible to shed a tear as he is standing near the pain-torn body of his boy. Something has snapped within him and now his organs and muscles seem to be out of commission. He moves slowly, his head is hanging low and he can neither laugh nor cry, Long Hendrik. Just because of a stupid wheel that in one turn crushed his child and all his dreams . . .

Eight months later Bernard is coming home. He is walking on crutches, Crisje's wild man who could not be tamed. Now they all hear what he has gone through. Fourteen times they have operated on him, each time the doctors had to remove another piece of his leg until at last the knee had to go too and there was only a stump left. His right leg had been broken in three places, his right arm in two and his hipbone had been splintered. But now he shall have an artificial leg. How he shall be able to walk and

run again, yes, even play football . . . He's even joking, now, but nobody can bring up a smile except he himself.

Bernard has not quite recovered yet and the doctor orders him to bed for a while, and Bernard is glad to comply. In these days Jeus is inseparable from him, Bernard has only to look and Jeus is already there. He brings him everything he wants and as he goes to school, he says to Bernard:

"If you feel bored, speak with Vanny; he can understand everything."

And Vanny is all attention when Bernard is speaking to him. He sits down on his haunches and answers him in his own way. But this is for Bernard nothing but the barking of a dog and he doesn't like it so that he chases him away with his crutch.

And every day Gerrit Noesthede is calling, smoking his pipe and telling his jokes. But once in a while he is serious. Then it may happen that he says:

"I remember very well, Bernard, when I was as small as you I could not be tamed, either, until one day Our Dear Lord said to me: 'Here, Gerrit, let this be a warning,' and He took a piece of my finger from me. Well, that was enough then for me, heh? And how I understood this hint! If that hadn't happened to me, you can believe me, I would have come between the wheels, some day, and then I would have been crushed, torn to bits . . .

"What has happened to you, Bernard, isn't half as bad as what I once saw happen in the factory. That fellow was another one who wouldn't listen, but they had to pick him up piecemeal. Your mother can be happy that you're still alive. And your father will have to build his air castles a

little differently, now, for it seems that often things turn out not the way as planned.

“Thus it is all the time. High above us there is Someone Who has the last word, and He knows exactly what He wants.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

There are wonderful things under the roof of Our Dear Lord

IT WAS A DRY, WARM SUMMER, AND NOW AUTUMN IS HERE with raw weather, rain, wind and—the grippe. In the Wageman home Long Hendrik, Jan, Jeus and Gerrit have to stay in bed. When Long Hendrik is sneezing the window panes rattle; he is a difficult patient. He doesn't like to be in bed, he moans loudly and continuously and cannot lie quiet for a minute. Nobody is as sick as he, he grumbles. Crisje can easily talk, she does not know what the grippe is, but that she is trembling as she is running up and down stairs with a red face, he doesn't see that, and it is a relief for him as he finally is well enough to get up. And a relief it is for Mother Crisje, too. Take a little walk when the weather is dry, the doctor has told him, and Crisje finally persuades him to follow this advice.

Crisje is worried about her Long Hendrik. Since the accident with Bernard he is not the same any more. His violin is staying in its box and he doesn't sing any more, either, so that the quartet seems to be dissolved. And, whereas Bernard himself is now on top again and learns how to dress himself with only one leg, Hendrik is becoming more and more depressed. Bernard is handy with the needle and has made a pair of trousers for Jeus with two pockets in it which makes him very proud; Long Hendrik

doesn't have to be sad about Bernard, especially now that he has an artificial leg which enables him to run around very nicely. They are pretty clever, those doctors, the way they can fix up a fellow who has been crippled like that. It is miraculous!

With his hands on his back Long Hendrik is walking down the gravel road to the inn. There he stands, turning his glass around and around, lifting his hand slowly as he sees some friends, but he doesn't talk with anybody.

His thoughts are not here. He is standing on the stage in Wesel, to his right and left there are Gerrit, Jan Maandag and Peter with his sons, and his own boys in front of him: Jan, Bernard and Jeus. How he has been longing for the moment! He is looking at his sons and at the crowded hall and now he can laugh and cry, Long Hendrik, but that's not what he's doing, he is singing! The others are directing their singing after him and the deeper voices of Gerrit and Peter and Jan are blending with the cheerful, bright singing of the children into a splendid harmony.

And they are returning with a cake, a yard long. After this success Long Hendrik had decided. For the time being he shall teach his children himself, but later they shall go to the city to study singing there. These boys have wonderful voices, they should accomplish more than he, Long Hendrik has accomplished. They just have to, yes, they have to. That's what he has told them. But since that time much has happened. Long Hendrik had to learn that life has no consideration for the wishes and plans of one human being, even if that human being is Hendrik Wage-man, the man who has been so lucky so far. His three boys shall never sing on the stage, the people don't like to look at a boy with a wooden leg.

Hendrik has not yet gotten over it. He is not quarreling with his fate, oh no, but it was a heavy blow, too heavy! Oh yes, those doctors are clever. If Long Hendrik needed an artificial leg, they surely can make one to order for him, but for shattered dreams they have nothing.

Crisje and Jeus are thinking of father as he is walking outside. Jeus is in school, at least his body. But his soul has left that building, he has gone out to follow father. Father is drinking. He is looking right into the whiskey glass and doesn't talk to anybody. Silently he empties one glass after the other.

Jeus is frightened as he is looking at the light that is surrounding his father. (José has told him once that this light is called the "human aura.") This light is not bright as that of the others in the room, and Jeus knows only too well what this means. "You go and have another drink," Jeus is thinking and he has a strange feeling. Then he returns to his body which is in school. He shall have to prepare mother in some way for that which is going to happen now, although he better not tell her everything.

"Mother, don't be scared now, but father is drinking."

"Does your feeling tell you that, too?" Jeus is embarrassed by this answer. Does mother know more already?

The drinking does not make father noisy or quarrelsome. Already in the door he says to Crisje:

"Give me a good bawling-out, mother. Are you angry at me? Can you forgive me? Smile at me, Crisje, smile at your Long Hendrik?"

Crisje is giving him a smile, yes, but a lecture, too.

"Haven't we enough to worry about? Do you have to drink now, too? Aren't there enough drunkards in this world? Haven't you learned anything? Do you want us to

wind up in the poorhouse? No, Hendrik, you mustn't do that. Look what I've to worry about! You have to accept things, look your fate straight into the eye and learn to bow your long head. If the boys are not to sing, then they'll have to do what Our Dear Lord wants them to do. You can have your own wishes and plans, but you have to be prepared that they might not come out the way you want it, see?"

That's what Crisje is saying, and her words show plainly what her spiritual attitude is.

And a few weeks later Long Hendrik is sick again and the doctor orders him back to bed.

That night Jeus has a strange dream. Father has died and is being buried. But it seems that father plans to fool everybody, including mother. For as the procession is starting for the cemetery, there's Long Hendrik joining the mourners! He is looking with a smile at all the people in black, and also at the casket, his own casket. . . . This is just like daddy, he's always full of jokes thinks Jeus. Then he walks near Jeus, going to his own funeral. What big steps father can make! Jeus is trying to keep step with him but he has to move his little legs very fast. Gerrit, his little brother nudges him with the elbow and says to him:

"You ought to be ashamed, trying to imitate father."

With a shock Jeus awakens. His dream is still clear before his eyes. He decides not to talk about it to father and mother, it may only cause more trouble in the house.

Crisje feels now that the old "one-ness" which she always had with Jeus is disturbed. Suddenly she has to think of the terrible morning when she had to hear, all alone, from Mrs. Einders that Bernard had been run over. Jeus, her spiritual support was asleep, then. In the hours when

the human being is asked to stand the test, when he has to show what he can and will, he is always alone, she knows that. Then her thoughts follow this trend: Her Hendrik is sick, Jeus is withdrawing more and more from her, doesn't that indicate a new trial? And the depressed feeling which she has had for the last weeks, doesn't it indicate the same thing?

Father is talking about the things which he is going to do as soon as he may get up again. Some of his old enthusiasm has returned to him.

"Once I'm better again, Cris, I'll act differently, you'll see."

"God will do the right thing by us," thinks Crisje and she can hardly keep her tears back.

Long Hendrik has now plenty of time to observe Crisje in her daily work. Has he ever stopped to think how a woman is spending the hours of her day? She does not only have to take care of seven children, but there is also a sick husband to look after, and in the meantime neighbors are coming and going, people who want advice from Crisje, and help, too, for like everywhere else there is a lot of trouble and misery around here, too. Add to this the work in field and garden, much of which she is doing merely to feed the poor, and Hendrik's respect for Crisje is growing and growing. "You're a saint, Crisje,"—how often has he heard people say this to her. And he agrees, she really is a saint!

And then again Hendrik's thoughts are wandering to his boys. Was it wrong of him to adore his children so? But wasn't it a beautiful sight, his six boys in a row! Priests they were to become, professors, singers, nothing was too high, too good for them.

"Oh, how a man can boast, what, Crisje? But we have nothing to say. All the wonderful things which I wanted to do? And all was for nothing!"

However, he doesn't mean it very much, for already a half hour later he is explaining to Gerrit Noesthede and Jan Maandag all the wonderful things he is going to do as soon as he'll be better.

"When I'll be better . . ."

But Crisje can feel that Hendrik shall never be better again, and she has learned that, in the face of this clear language of her feelings, nothing can be done. Her heart becomes heavy at the very thought. Her Hendrik no longer with her? She can't bear the thought.

Towards Hendrik she never utters her feelings, her thoughts. Should she disturb his rest? Should she knock down his air castles with a rude hand? Hendrik has never completely recovered from Bernard's accident. No, if there has to be any more suffering, she will carry the burden alone.

There is a wine such as Hendrik has never yet delivered to his customers. Our Dear Lord offers you this wine to drink. It is more acrid than the strongest vermouth and more bitter than poison. The Lord may offer this wine at any time, day or night, and nobody can refuse to drink. In these days Crisje is beginning to drink from this cup; she will have to empty it to the very bottom and there will not be one drop for Hendrik. For the name of this wine is sharp and short, not flowery and enticing like the wines which he likes to drink; the name is: Struggle.

Besides Jeus and Mother Crisje it is Vanny who seems to anticipate a serious event in the family of his little master. The dog is barking and howling day and night and finally

Jeus has to talk to him. After a long walk with Vanny he is resting on the stoop of the "old mint," the building where formerly the money had been coined. In this building there lives now old Mina, a peculiar person who had somehow acquired the nickname Mina the Mint. There, Vanny begins to howl again and Jeus says:

"What are you crying so, Vanny? Are you unhappy? Have you had a dream, too? But dreams don't always come true. Now you listen to me very carefully, Vanny." He takes the dog up by his front legs and looks into his teary dog-eyes: "The doctor says that everything will be all right again. Now don't you scare mother any longer, or she'll understand why you're crying. Will you stop it now? Here you can cry as much as you want to, but at home you'll have to be quiet. Understand, Vanny? Now, aren't you going to say something to me?"

Vanny lifts his head and barks just once at his master. And when Vanny says "yes," "yes" it is.

Long Hendrik is feeling so much better now that the doctor is permitting him to get up for an hour. As the children are coming home, father is sitting at the table. The caps are flying off their heads and onto the bench near the door. "How'dy, Father, How'dy, Mother." They are happy that father may be up already and they show it. Jeus, too, is showing great happiness, but that feeling within him cannot be silenced. After a little while father feels tired. Crisje helps him back into bed. Her heart is beating again, just as on that morning of Bernard's accident. That evening she's putting the children early to bed. Now she's alone.

Alone with the knowledge that she's going to lose her Long Hendrik. In this hour Crisje does not cry and fall

on her knees. She's stronger now than ever. As Gerrit Noesthede is coming to visit Hendrik she asks him to go and call the priest, to administer to Long Hendrik.

Gerrit is frightened, and it is not clear to him if it is because of the message or because of the quiet firmness in which Crisje is speaking. She has everything ready on the little table by the side of Hendrik's bed, the crucifix and the candles, water and cotton. Then the priest comes with the Holy Host, to see Long Hendrik, his singer in church. In the meantime Gerrit has also called the doctor. Quietly Crisje is answering his questions; he cannot tell her anything new. She sits down next to the bed and places her hands into those of Hendrik. She is not crying, shows no emotion, she only looks deeply into his eyes while her mouth is still able to show a smile, that's what he is going to take with him on his trip into the great beyond, this, rather than tears. And then Hendrik is speaking his last words:

"Cris, my Cris. It's altogether different, so different, I know it now. Gerrit, tell the others that I want to greet them. Cris, our Jeus, I know him now, Cris, yes, I know him, only now. I have nothing else to say, you know everything, anyway. Cris, I—am—going—to—bye-bye, Cris my holy Cris—."

Crisje doesn't have to close his eyes. Long Hendrik is doing it himself, he is sparing her this.

Sleep will not come to Jeus. He is lying restlessly in bed, keeping his eyes closed forcibly, but his spirit is awake and forces him to open his eyes again. Jeus is lying on his back, it is very quiet in the house. He can hear Gerrit Noesthede's voice who is talking in a subdued tone, probably

not to awaken father. Jeus stays where he is, mother is walking to and fro; he can exactly hear where she is, sometimes he can tell by the noises she's making. Talking in the hallway. Father Reenen has come. He doesn't have to hide his head under the covers, the noises keep him alert. The doctor has been there, and after that the door has been opened and closed frequently. Jeus is waiting . . .

And now Jeus can see for whom he is waiting; he pushes his covers back and sits up. Out of the dark of the room there appears a figure, it is father. He is walking towards his little bed. Jeus cries: "Father, father," and he forgets to whisper.

Father is stopping near his bed. "Quiet, Jeus," says he. His voice is so soft and tender, it almost makes Jeus cry. "You must listen now, just listen, Jeus. I am dead, but listen, I'm still alive. You must tell mother. That's all, but you must tell her. I'll be back again, and pretty soon, too."

Now father has disappeared. Jeus is staring at the spot where he has been standing and where now only his words are in the air. He recalls them, word for word, repeating them softly to himself. Then he goes into action. One-two he is out of his bed. He awakens Gerrit—Jan is sleeping upstairs, Bernard is sleeping out where he works. Jeus says:

"Come, Gerrit, father is dead. Come out of your bed, father is dead."

But Gerrit wants to sleep. He turns around and grumbles.

"Gerrit, Gerrit, father is dead, come or I'll throw you out of bed."

"Hold your mouth, stupid," says Gerrit. "What are you saying, are you dreaming again?"

Gerrit is fighting for his sleep. He is hitting his brother.

Aunt Trui has heard the quarrel and now she's coming into the bedroom:

"Will you stop that?"

Jeus stands in front of her. "How's father, Aunt Trui?"

"He's much better."

Jeus becomes furious. He grabs her skirts and pulls: "You're lying, you're a liar. You've been lying all your life." Then he lets go. He slips out into the hallway and to father's room. Many people are there, and they're all looking serious. Some are crying. Mother is sitting near father's bed. How quiet father is lying there, and how pale he is. Jeus is hugging mother's neck.

"Mother, you mustn't cry, father isn't dead, father is coming back. He has told me so himself."

Has mother heard him? She's looking at him and Jeus is not sure that she's seeing him. He feels a stabbing pain in his chest. Why is she still so sad? Father has just gone away for a while, he'll be right back, these are his own words. Jeus is nudging mother softly.

"Mother, father is sure to come back, you have to believe me. Haven't I helped you always, mother?"

At last Mother Crisje starts to move. She has to act now. Gerrit and Jeus are to sleep at Mrs. de Man's, Jan with Bernard; she herself, Hendrik, Miets and Teun at Aunt Trui's.

"Do we have to sleep now with that booze-woman?" thinks Jeus resentfully, but he says nothing. The old, cross-eyed little woman is most cordial to them; she is showing the children where they have to sleep.

"Do you want to drink something first, boys?"

"No," says Jeus at once. "We're not thirsty." Gerrit is

already asleep. Jeus doesn't want anything from that booze-woman, nothing!

"Here," he remembers, "they have been throwing burning stoves and cursed so that all the devils in hell started to dance. And that's where we have to sleep!"

The old little woman acts as if she didn't know anything about the throwing of burning stoves, and not a curse is coming over her lips. She is tucking the children in very carefully, lovingly and strokes their hair with her trembling little hand, and this reconciles Jeus again with her and her family.

"Please give me a little drink of water, Mrs. de Man?"

Here he is lying now, he, Jeus, would never have thought it, in a bed of Mrs. de Man's. Behind this wall here, where he had been listening, eavesdropping so often when still a small child, there lies father. All alone. Father who is dead, but who is coming back. What a great many things to think about! Father is only fooling them all, it's just like him, ha. But mother is having sorrow through this. Why should father fool mother, then? The clock on the church spire is beating two. As the slow, heavy bongs have sounded out, another little clock somewhere else rings out quickly: Beng-beng. Two o'clock and Jeus is still awake. But suddenly he feels tired. He is sinking away into dream-land, deeper and deeper and it becomes very quiet around him. As he is opening his eyes he finds that he is standing next to his body. It is nothing new to Jeus. Now he can look through the walls, they are just like transparent clouds for him. Jeus is stepping through. He wants to see what father is doing. Father hasn't even moved yet. Jeus sits down on the same chair on which mother has been

sitting this evening. Father looks terribly white. It's probably from his sickness. But around his mouth there's something like a smile. Of course, this joke gives father a lot of fun, but he should stop it now . . .

Jeus sees that high above clouds are drifting. Out of one of these suddenly a large ray of light is coming, coming down right straight on father's face. Jeus follows it with his eyes: it is glancing over father's body and finally comes to rest near the foot end. Is Jeus seeing right? There is father, standing with spread-out arms; Jeus jumps from the chair and flies into his father's arms. "Father!" Hendrik is pressing the child against his chest and Jeus feels the warmth of his body coming over into his own.

"Jeus, Jeus, now I know into what world you have been able to look, now I know it, only now."

They are standing together for a long time, father and son, without saying a word. Then Jeus asks him:

"Are you now going there again, father? You can do so as soon as you want to—but you mustn't fool mother too long, she may never forgive you."

But father doesn't answer; he is only looking behind Jeus. Jeus follows him and sees a light growing there, it becomes bigger and bigger, and in the center of it Jeus suddenly sees the figure of the long man who is coming close to Jeus, now. And in Jeus a great joy is springing up; now father is going to meet his friend, the long man. They are standing together now, both tall—long—how they resemble each other!

Then the long man, his friend, begins to speak:

"Jeus, now you'll have to listen well to what I'm going to say to you. Your father is going now to work for Our Dear Lord, and that's a work different from the work he's

been doing on earth. But father will come back. You must now go to sleep and help mother. Father is going with me to Our Dear Lord."

"Will you take good care of mother, Jeus?" It is father who is asking this question.

"Yes, father, you can count on that."

Jeus still remembers that he is floating in the air. Then it becomes dark around him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Long Hendrik is coming for the empty cup

JEUS IS OPENING HIS EYES IN STRANGE SURROUNDINGS. THESE curtains, the chest, the picture, the chairs—then suddenly he remembers and jumps out of bed. How dilapidated everything here is, and how the floorboards are creaking! If the booze-woman only doesn't hear him! He rushes into his trousers and blouse, he washes, he is in a hurry. Jeus wants to go and see his mother who is with Ant Trui. He runs outside. It is cold but he doesn't mind the icy wind. There is mother. She's still crying. Jeus lifts her head; he wipes her tears away with the back of his hand. Then he begins to speak with her, earnestly, resolutely.

"You have to listen to me very carefully now, mother." He emphasizes every word. "Father is alive, but he has to work now for Our Dear Lord. His work is not the same as what he's been doing here on earth, mother, and—father is coming back here, soon. Will you now stop crying, mother? Will you now laugh to me, mother? Don't make such a long face, mother, I'm still here, too, yes?"

But why can't he make mother laugh now? There's no reason at all for crying. Yes—if father were never to come back, but hasn't even the long man, his friend, assured

him that father would come back? And his friend is an angel, therefore—

Sadly Jeus is eating his sandwiches. He washes them down with large gulps of coffee. He doesn't have to go to school today, and he doesn't feel like going outside. He wouldn't leave his mother for a second—where she is, he is too. Again and again he is telling mother how father was looking when he saw him last night, and what shall the peasants say when father comes back and goes to work again as if nothing had happened! Thus he is talking with mother to prevent her from falling back into her deep sorrow.

"Oh, if I didn't have you, my boy, what would I do?" Mother Crisje is hugging him tenderly.

If mother only wouldn't cry any more . . .

He has to go on errands for Aunt Trui. He runs as fast as he can so as to be back with mother quickly again.

School is out. The children are pouring into the street. As they see Jeus they quickly stop laughing and make a sad face, and as he is standing before them they only dare to whisper. They are looking at him as if he were a strange animal.

"Is your father dead, Jeus? And don't you cry?"

Jeus wants to act normally and asks them how it was in school this morning? But that makes the children angry. They think that he has to speak with a broken voice, his eyes under him and wet with tears. Well, when your father has died—One of them has to come out with it:

"Your eyes aren't even red. You can't even cry, heh—"

Jeus is hurt now. "Mind your own business, you . . ." he cries and furiously he runs away, to mother.

There are black-dressed men in the house. Jeus knows them, the men that have been sent by the undertaker; he has to laugh as he is looking into their serious faces: bleak, faded flowers in a pitch black field . . . Funeral men—what faces they'll make when father will suddenly get up and shows that he isn't dead at all. But now one of the two men is mentioning the word coffin, and later on mother and Aunt Trui are saying it too, and then a coffin is actually ordered. And as Jeus is comprehending the irrevocable finality which is inherent with this word, with its tightly screwed cover and all, Jeus feels a sudden fear coming up within him. Isn't father letting it go too far?

In the evening the family, neighbors, peasants and friends are gathering around father's bed in order to pray for his soul. Candles are burning and Jeus thinks that only a picture of the three Wise Men and a cradle with the Christ Child are needed and it is a Christmas. The mysterious flickering of the candles and the long shadows are a little scary to Jeus. Seriously he bows his head. The sexton is leading the prayer and the others are repeating: "Pray for us." He is praying the Litany of the Holy Virgin. "Tower of David," he's saying. "Pray for us," comes the answer. Jeus is hearing the words as if they were coming from far away. No wonder, he's again playing hide and seek in the clouds, and, as he has played enough of this game, he goes quickly to Hans the bull and strokes his broad nose.—"Ark of the Covenant"—"Pray for us."—Jeus is running in the high, cool forest with Vanny. In the meantime the sexton has begun to pray the rosary. "Our Father Who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come . . ." That great calm has come over Jeus again and while his lips are still saying the words, his

spirit has gone away, gone to the place where the great light is shining.

From high on he can see the outline of a vast garden; Jeus distinguish the flowers and the trees, even the fruits that are glistening among the leaves and branches, and he sees people dressed in white, shining gowns, and he sees father. "The Lord is with you, you are blessed . . ." Father is singing, he stands on a little hill; his head is raised and there's a halo around it; father is giving thanks to his creator in a voice so beautiful, so clear—Jeus has never heard him sing like that.

"Mother, mother, father is here, father is singing!"

The sexton is silent. Everybody looks frightened at the child who has jumped up from his chair and is now throwing his arms around his mother's neck. A little later, as he is alone with her, he says:

"Will you stop crying now, mother? Father has been singing, so beautifully, mother, for Our Dear Lord, for you and for the angels."

Around noontime the coffin is brought in. Aunt Trui is going into the house, too. Then, as the men have left she locks the door of the little house so that Jeus is trying in vain to get in to see his father. But he knows a different way how to get in. He climbs through the shack where the pigs are kept and from there into the house.

Father is lying in the casket. So, that's how far it has come already! Jeus is standing there and doesn't know what he should think of it. It takes too long, father, mother will not believe any more that you'll come back. There are yellow spots on your face, the lips are so straight and your nose so lean. Say something to me, father. Come back now, they're going to put you into the ground now and how

will you come back then? Don't make so much sorrow for mother, she can't stand it any longer, and I can't either . . .

Jeus wants to bring a chair, to give father a kiss but he feels that something is keeping him back, he cannot move his feet. His eyes cannot leave father's face. Around father's head there seems to be a shine. Now father is actually opening his eyes, his lips are moving—father is speaking!

"Are you coming to visit me, Jeus?"

"Yes, father. But—why do you let them put you into the casket?"

"That's the way it belongs, see?"

"But can you then still come back?"

"Yes, you shall see."

"Are you fooling the people, father?"

"No, Jeus, not quite that. Just you wait, Jeus, and see."

"If I were you, I wouldn't let it go too far. You've spots in your face already, and how will you get rid of these, then?"

"That comes all by itself. We human beings don't have to do anything to that."

"If the people knew that, then they wouldn't have to be afraid any more?"

"They know it right along, see? But to understand, that's something else again."

"How beautiful you have been singing, father. Much more beautifully than in the quartet. Mother should have heard that, and all the others—then they would surely have believed that you aren't really dead. Father?"

"Yes, Jeus?"

"Does Gerrit Noesthede know that you are fooling him?"

"No, Jeus. Gerrit is still asleep just like all the other people. Just as I was before I knew about it myself."

"And Peter, father?"

"Listen well, Jeus: Peter will have to come here himself pretty soon, and also Uncle Gradus. Just like me, they'll have to come and work for Our Dear Lord. And then we're going to sing here again, and then you'll have to listen to us, you and mother. Angels will join us then, too."

"Yes, father, I have seen them. How beautiful they were, heh?"

"Tell mother, Jeus, that I have now about twenty violins, and they're good ones, too, and that I'll do my best here. I shall play a lot for mother, I'll be using all these twenty violins, so let mother listen carefully, it'll help her. —Jeus, don't say anything to Aunt Trui, but to mother only. Hear?"

"About Uncle Gradus, father?"

"Yes, and don't forget, now, my boy. And now you'll have to leave, Jeus. Aunt Trui is coming to look at me. But don't say anything."

The door is opening and Aunt Trui is coming in with another peasant woman. As she sees Jeus she's frightened.

"What are you doing in here? Get out of here and make it quick!"

Mother Crisje is finding great consolation in the words which Jeus is bringing her. She does not answer, she does not cry. Pressing her cheek against his hair she is drinking in the message which he's bringing.

"I've spoken with father, mother. He has a great many violins and he'll play them all to pieces for you. And he's going to do his very best. And father says that Uncle Gradus has to go where he is soon, and Peter, too. But say nothing to Aunt Trui, heh? Father says that this is the

end of the quartet, mother. He wants you to listen as he's singing and playing."

That evening they're praying again. How stupid, thinks Jeus. That "Pray for us," somehow, isn't right. Father lives, he knows it for sure now. Jeus cannot utter one word; he's looking around in the room, at the kneeling people. They're father's friends, and they're praying with all their hearts, but there are also some who never had liked his father, who even talked bad about him, and their faces show just as much devotion as they're saying their prayers. Hypocrites, thinks the boy. They're praying for father whom they do not like. What'll they say if they find out that father has been fooling them?

The "Baldhead" is here, too. Jeus has to smile when he looks at his broad face. The "Baldhead"! On the wings of the "Pray for us" Jeus' thoughts are flying away, off to the "Baldhead." He was making his living by carting hot meals on his wagon to the workmen in Emmerik. He had been doing this for twenty years and in the course of time his white horse and he himself had become old and slow. One of his nephews, "Little Heints" went into competition with him and now there came bad days for the old man. With a new, young horse the nephew brought the meals faster and soon the Baldhead had no more eaters. While he and his old horse were starving, Heints was doing good business. But there is a justice, and this justice made Heints crash with his wagon into a pump. Heints was killed in the accident.

It seems that the empty stomach had not entirely killed the family-spirit in the Baldhead, at least he talked beautifully about Heints at his grave. And this is what he said:

"Here we are again, we human beings of this world.

Such is life. Today—red, tomorrow—dead. Who would have thought it?—Not I—” but then his funeral speech became a little more severe, strict:

“That you went and delivered the meals, all right—everybody has to eat. But I’m an old man and have a family. You tricked me, Heints. You had houses, and even horses, but would you’ve sold me one? No. I still cannot stomach this. Well, anyway, I forgive you now. Oh, what am I saying? . . .”

It seems that then the feeling of hunger which he had suffered for so long came up again within the Baldhead, for suddenly he spoke furiously:

“Forgive?—No, I can’t forgive that! Never!” And passionately he stomped the ground with his foot. But then something terrible happened: The Baldhead stumbled and fell into the grave right on top of the casket of Heints! And while he was climbing out of the grave, he cried, beside himself with fury:

“No, little Heints, that you have stolen the bread right out of my mouth, I will never forget that, you low-down so-and-so.”

This incident had caused endless laughter in the village. Gerrit Noesthede had told the story right here in this room colorfully, beautifully as is Gerrit’s way of telling stories, and as Jeus is thinking of it now he suddenly breaks out into a roaring laughter. Again he is the cause of trouble during the prayer. He cannot stop laughing until Aunt Trui is coming with a little bottle which she is holding under his nose so that he has to smell it. “Poor child,” the people are saying. “All out of his wits.” But the real reason why Jeus is laughing is that he cannot earnestly pray for a soul whom he knows to be happy and as much

alive as mother, the Baldhead, the sexton and anybody. . . .

Today Long Hendrik is being buried.

"Are you going to help me tomorrow?" mother has asked him yesterday. For she knows, Mother Crisje, that she will be in need of strength on the day that they are carrying her Hendrik out of the house. She is crying so much that Jeus is embracing her and whispers into her ear:

"Father is playing on his violin, and he is singing for you, mother. And you are crying? What should Our Dear Lord think?"

As Mother Crisje is taking her place behind the hearse she is carrying herself straight and her eyes are dry.

The singers of the church choir are the pall-bearers. Behind them come Crisje and Aunt Trui, then Jan and Bernard, Jeus and Gerrit and then follows the long train of relatives, friends, acquaintances, peasants.

But there's another one who is following the coffin, but nobody can see him. With great, slow steps he is walking next to Jeus.

"I'm here, now," says Long Hendrik.

Jeus is thinking of his dream. Here is father, walking next to him just as he had dreamed. Jeus tries to keep step with the long legs of his father. Gerrit is nudging him: "You ought to be ashamed," he whispers.

"Yes," says Jeus. "I was waiting for you to say that."

"Now, you mustn't imitate me, Jeus." It is father who is saying this. And at the same time Gerrit grumbles: "Do you have to imitate father?"

After the beautiful church service the coffin is carried out of the church to the grave. Here Jeus is seeing father again, but this time he is standing next to mother. Slowly



the coffin is lowered. Is Mother Crisje going to faint now? Her eyes are not dry any more and her knees tremble. But suddenly Jeus sees that father is going over into mother, he simply is stepping into her body so that they become as one, just as he, Jeus, has done so often himself after his wanderings with José and the long man. Mother Crisje suddenly has received new strength, she has received it from her Long Hendrik . . . In this hour Crisje is drinking the last drop and it is Hendrik who has come for the empty cup, to bring it back to their God.

On the way home Jeus sees his friend, the other "long man" who is bringing peace into his young, perturbed heart. "He's coming back, but it'll be some time . . ."

Together with Vanny, Jeus has run out into the wintery woods, away from those eating people, those smoking men and talking women, far away from the funeral feast. There's so much that he has to think about.

"Did you see all those black clothes, Vanny?"

Vanny barks as if he had understood.

"And father isn't dead at all, how they would look if they knew. They eat, Vanny, as if they had been starved for weeks. Look, if father were really dead, you wouldn't do such a thing. This isn't the village fair now! But father doesn't care, I know. When I die I want to be buried in white. How do I get that thought? From the other world, Vanny. José's told me that. Come, Vanny, lie right close next to me, then you won't tremble any more. Are you hungry?" Vanny barks.

"Yes, I'm hungry, too. But with all those people around I won't be able to eat a bite. I don't know what it is, I can't help it. Did you see how "Wet-a-pants" was eating? Her eyes were bulging, the way she was stuffing herself.

She's so greedy that she may burst any time. I don't like her, she talks much too much, Vanny. She talks about everybody. Tomorrow we shall hear that our rolls were not good enough. But Our Dear Lord shall punish her. He knows everything."

For a while more the boy and his dog are walking around. The dead branches are cracking under his shoes. There is some snow here and there. Then Jeus is standing still.

"Do you want me to make a funeral speech for you, Vanny, as Father Reenen did this morning? But then you have to lie down and act as if you were dead; then I know what I'm going to say later on. No, not this way, Vanny, you've to lie on your back. Dead people always are lying on their backs. And now listen well and close your eyes, for it is very holy what I'm going to say.

"Oh, Vanny, what a good dog you were! You loved all the people and you had a good head, too. And how nice you could sing . . ."

No, that's not correct. Vanny barks, he doesn't sing, and it isn't nice, either. But the dog has already had enough of this game. He jumps up and runs into the bushes.

And Jeus continues his "thinking."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

“Where is father now, José?”

NO, IT IS NOT THE ADDED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HER FAMILY that has come so suddenly upon Crisje which is breaking her spirit. During those long nights when she had been lying awake thinking, she had figured it out, how she would be able to save her family. Courageously she looked at the facts. From now on seven children had to be fed and clothed by her hands. And while she is busy bringing the money together which is needed for this, she has to find enough time to take care of her brood as formerly, to look after them. She figures that she can earn herself a certain amount. Then Bernard is bringing home his wages every week, Jan is earning also and as soon as Jeus shall have finished school he, too, is to go and look for a job. Thus Crisje is planning to keep her family together, her family that seemed so sturdy and strong while Hendrik was still alive with his strong body and happy soul, with his merry laugh.

Exhausted she drops into bed every night, she's too tired to sleep. Well, her children have a roof over their heads, they have enough to eat, enough clothing and covers. Yes, there are even people who are poorer than Crisje who are coming to her door to ask for aid. No, it isn't that.

It is her sorrow. Everything she's doing reminds her of Hendrik, of his love, his happiness, his devotion to her, his strength. Every day he is standing next to her, walking

with her through the house. But when her heart is so full that she wants to speak with him, then he escapes her, and disappears, her dead Hendrik. Then her hands fall down by her sides and her eyes are filling with tears. Then she thinks that she cannot go on any more. Then she feels sure that he will never come back to her, he who was her very breath of life, her world.

"If you want to die, mother, then you only have to go on like this. You don't believe any more, mother. Am I not telling you that father is not dead? Can't you believe me?"

Jeus is not accomplishing much with such words. Crisje listens with interest for a minute, then she falls back into her grave thinking.

Two months after the death of Long Hendrik, Uncle Gradus and Peter die within a short time. Mother Crisje is scared. She remembers the words of Jeus. Now Trui is needing her and for a time it looks as if Mother Crisje is becoming her old self again. But hardly has Trui been straightened out in her troubles, and Crisje is brooding again.

No, this time it will not be so easy for her to recover.

One evening Jeus is alone with his mother. Crisje is sitting near the tiled stove. As Jeus is looking up he sees that she is crying. And at once he becomes very calm, very quiet. He feels a warmth welling up within him and then, suddenly his mouth begins to speak:

"Crisje, I thought that you were greater than that."

"What are you saying?" asks Crisje in astonishment.

"That you were greater, and your faith much stronger. But you, you're acting just as the other people, you cry."

Am I not telling you that I am here, that I'm not dead, Cris, and that I'm happy? Can't you understand me?"

Crisje cannot say a word. Is this really Hendrik who is speaking there through Jeus' mouth? It seems that way—the voice is not that of Jeus, it is deeper . . .

"Our Dear Lord has said to me," the voice is interrupting her thoughts, "because Crisje has done so much good I may leave my work for the Lord for a while and go down to talk with her. And now I am here, Cris, I am it truly, your Long Hendrik, and I'm asking you not to sit there in the corner, and to cheer up! I promise you that I'll stay with you all through your life, Our Dear Lord has granted this to me. But don't let down, Cris, you have to work, Cris, you still have the boys, haven't you? And isn't there Jeus for you?"

What should Crisje think now? There is Hendrik and he is talking with her, telling her how she has to act. Hendrik who has died, he lives in Jeus; his child is bringing his words over to her. She is speechless. Then she whispers: "I shall do it—eh—Jeus?" She doesn't dare to say "Hendrik."

"Will you start all over, then?"

"Yes, Jeus, I shall do my best. Now I'm the old Cris again. Thank God, thank God so much."

"Cris, I'm going now. Don't forget that I'm with you always, that I am helping you. It may sound funny, heh, Cris, but you must know that the human beings don't know yet everything about Our Dear Lord. Jeus is right, they are asleep like 'possums. My own Cris, will you now stop looking at the door every night to see if I'm not coming? You must know that mine is now the Kingdom of the Heavens, and that I'm waiting here for you."

"Hendrik, is it really you, then?"

"Yes, I'm your own Hendrik. But now I have to go. Jeus cannot bear this too long. Now you know, Cris, what the word "obsessed" means. Bye, my dear Cris."

Jeus is awakening as from a deep sleep. He looks around in surprise. Then he runs for the pail of water to drink. He still remembers how he became quiet and warm within, but of the rest he is unconscious.

From that time on Mother Crisje is the old "Mother Crisje" again. The people are noticing it and they say that she has a strong character.

"You have to bear up under the load," they say, "be it only for the sake of your seven children." And everybody has admiration for her.

Days and weeks are passing by. Night and day Jeus is looking out for his father who had promised him so firmly that he would come back. Father has closed his eyes, has been buried and has gone to work for Our Dear Lord. Then he has gone away with his friend the long man. And it seems that since then he has forgotten Jeus and mother and his other children.

And life is going on as usual. The stupid peasant women don't stop to lament to Crisje that Long Hendrik has to die so young, as if Mother Crisje needed someone to remind her of her Long Hendrik! But nobody is saying anything that father might suddenly come back some day. Jeus only tries to convince himself that soon father may be sitting in the room again and play the violin and sing. Of course, father will be very busy now. The work which he has received from Our Dear Lord is very important and will take up much of his time. But Jeus will not doubt the

promises which father has made to him and also the long man. Yet, these doubts are becoming stronger as time is passing on. Why doesn't father keep his promise?

Sometimes Jeus tries to throw these burning questions off his mind. That is when he runs around and fools with his dog Vanny and no game is wild enough for him. But he cannot escape these questions for long.

Crisje is beginning to worry over her boy. He eats little and is listless. His little face is becoming more pale and pointed every day.

When she asks him what he has on his mind he will not answer. The doctor is called, but he cannot find anything wrong with the boy. Crisje is talking to him, asking him to eat his meals as he used to. "You don't want to make trouble for mother, Jeus? And if you want to go out for a job, soon, to help mother with the household, Jeus, you'll have to be strong and healthy." No, Jeus doesn't want to make trouble for mother and he stuffs his meals down, without appetite, however. But it doesn't help, his stomach throws the food up. It is a problem which he has on his mind, a serious problem which is pertaining to the honesty and veracity of his father. . . .

Mother is sticking Jeus into bed. Now there is nothing left with which he can occupy his mind. But he is thinking and brooding. His father, has he misunderstood him? As he sees that mother is crying he does something almost insane. He thinks that he has to blame his head that he cannot find an answer to his question; therefore he beats himself there with his fists, mercilessly he pummels himself around his head to punish it because it doesn't want to "think"—or maybe it cannot . . . ?

Soon Jeus develops a fever and now the doctor is worried.

He fears that he is going to lose this patient, and, although he is not mentioning it to Mother Crisje, she knows what he is thinking. The following morning, after she has helped Jan get out of the house, she runs to church to receive the Holy Communion. After the prayer with the priest she sits alone in the pew and prays by herself, from the bottom of her heart:

"My Father in Heaven, please let me keep my boy . . ."

Every spare minute she is sitting at Jeus' bed. His face is burning with fever, sometimes he is delirious. Crisje hears him say: "Father, father, why aren't you coming back? Haven't you promised me . . ."

Now the doctor is calling three times a day. The days follow each other, but Jeus' condition does not change. Once in a while he opens his eyes, but he cannot keep them open, they feel as heavy as lead. Crisje feels that the doctor has given up hope.

Mother Crisje who is now sitting at Jeus' bedside almost continuously asks the doctor: "What do you think, doctor, can't you find out what's wrong?"

"We have to wait, Aunt Crisje, he may change suddenly, but we cannot know. We cannot do anything but wait."

At night, too, Crisje is near Jeus. She is getting hardly any sleep. Jeus is burning with fever, and Crisje thinks that he cannot stand this much longer. Suddenly he is smiling.

Crisje thinks that he wants to say something. But she is afraid to listen, for she believes that she knows what it is that Jeus is going to say and she prays again: "Not that, my God, not that. You're not going to die, Jeus? What shall I do then. My God, leave me my Jeus. Don't take him away from me, no, My Dear Lord, don't do that, leave me my boy." Crisje is sitting there with folded hands. Now

she sinks down upon her knees before the bed. She begins to say the Lord's Prayer.

With the first light of the morning Jeus is opening his eyes.

"Have you slept some, Jeus?"

But the child does not answer.

"I'll give you something to drink, Jeus. You must be thirsty."

Jeus is drinking avidly.

"Are you now going nicely to sleep again?"

"Yes, mother."

This is the first word which he has said in weeks. He is closing his eyes again and falls asleep. He goes into a dream.

He sees himself again, a small child crawling through the room. A long man with a pointed beard, just like father, is bringing children to him; they are different, though, they're dressed in shining white and play with golden balls. Later José is coming, too, and he becomes Jeus' best friend. He is bringing Jeus into a new world, the world where he is living which is filled with light and flowers. But Jeus cannot stay here, he has to return to the body which is waiting for him down there somewhere on earth where people are generally not as nice and friendly and good as the long man his friend and José and the children, and as father and mother, and where there is darkness and sorrow waiting for him. José, long man, father—he hears himself call out, longingly, desperately. He beats his fist against his head, but there is no light coming now, only pain. He believes now that father is not coming back any more. He can hear footsteps. They're swishing through the grass. He sees a boy who is bending over a flower, who is picking the flower and more and

more and joining them into a bunch. José! Jeus cries out in happiness and the two friends are falling into each other's arms.

"José, what are you doing here?"

"Can't you see? I'm picking flowers, all these flowers are for you, Jeus."

"That's very good of you, José, but why didn't you come, you let me wait so long. I have so much to ask you."

"But Jeus, why aren't you patient and wait till your father is coming back? Do you think that I could help you? Don't you know that the human beings have to go through all this alone? If you were told everything in life, well, then you wouldn't have any part in it, and you should have known that."

"Yes, that's true. Funny that I never thought of that."

"Your mother had to go through this, and my mother, too."

"What, do you have a mother, too?"

"Of course, and she is on earth, where you are living, and I have to help her. She doesn't know it, but that'll come—the long man is helping me to help her. The long man who looks just like your father says that everything will come out all right, but mother has to search for the truth, do her part. If the people don't do their parts, then they'll get nothing. You, too, are searching, Jeus, and that hurts, doesn't it?"

"And where is my father now, José?"

"I've seen your father, he'll be here soon, and your guardian angel, the long man, too."

"Guardian angel"—angel—the word thrills his little soul. His long friend is an angel, José has just said so! He is Jeus' guardian angel and he protects him in his earthly

life. And José is telling Jeus that he should listen to the long man so that he may learn and be able to do great things for mankind. And father is working hard, too, and when he has learned enough he shall come back as he has promised and then he shall be with mother and protect her.

The longer José is talking the more bright and happy Jeus' heart becomes; and his doubts disappear, one by one.

José is pointing towards the woods; the two long men are coming there, and for a long time Jeus is lying in his father's arms. Then he goes to the other long man and presses his head against his chest.

"Listen to me now carefully, Jeus. Your father is now dead for your world. He is lying down there in his grave and cannot do anything any more. The body, his earthly gown, is now destroyed. But here, where we now are, with Our Dear Lord, all people are receiving a new body, a new gown to wear, and here they can run again, laugh, think, talk, everything, and here they all have to work hard for Our Dear Lord. The people on earth don't know all this, and that's why your father said to you that he was dead and again not dead. And when he says that he's coming back he's not fooling you and the other people,—father is coming back, but in the same way as I am coming to you. Then father is going to help mother, just as José has told you. Through your searching you've learned a whole lot, but now you know everything and you'll be quickly well again."

The three happy persons are walking on the wide path. To Jeus' left goes the long man and to his right his father. He is holding his father's hands firmly; he wants to make the most of this happy moment.

"You know now, Jeus, that you shall not be waiting for me,—I am there with you at all times, but you must not think of me the way you have been doing these weeks. This kind of thought would not help you, and it will not help either if you beat yourself. Do you understand all this well, now, Jeus?"

Yes, Jeus understands and he shall never forget. The veil of his thinking has been lifted and the light of knowledge has come to him. Like a tiny, grey ball the earth is lying down there. And a little later they are walking on the gravel road; now they are at home. Here father is walking off, he enters the house and neither door nor brickwall is preventing him. Jeus sees that he is kissing mother, two, three times, but Crisje is continuing with her work. If she only knew who is standing next to her—mother has to feel that within her soul, way down from the depth of her heart! Then she certainly wouldn't cry any more.

As Jeus is awakening mother is sitting next to his bed. And the first thing he says is:

"My God, mother, what I have seen in the night! I've spoken with father and now I'm well again." And then Jeus tells the story.

The doctor comes. He looks at Jeus and claps his hands together in astonishment. He thinks that a miracle has happened. And a few days later Jeus is again the same as of old and only he and mother know how he was cured.

"But," finishes Mother Crisje after telling the story, "if I had not had him, I would have been lost. Look, he's now playing outside, he's interested in everything just like all the other children, but he certainly helped me when I was in trouble. And in my sorrow I have learned much. I believe in God and am doing my duty as I see it, but I know

that we cannot know everything, and therefore we don't understand what Our Dear Lord is doing, but for that we are only human beings. But now I have to do my work . . ."

From now on Father Reenen stops regularly at Mother Crisje's house.

And one fine day at noontime Jeus comes a-running into the house: "Mother," cries he, "I have a job!"

"A job? Where, my boy?"

"In the brush factory. I have to carry the shavings out, and do other things. I'm getting one guilder and a half, mother. Aren't you glad now, that I'm earning money?"

No, Mother Crisje is not glad altogether, Jeus can feel it and he suddenly knows what she is thinking of. "Mother," says he, "but I'll stay with you, always, and I'll always take care of you, mother."

For the last time Jeus is coming back from school. As always, Vanny is waiting for him. He enters his room and there are—long trousers, hanging over his chair. Mother and son are looking at each other; his time has come fast. The few days that are left to him before he has to start on his new—his first—job in the factory, he is using to go out with Vanny and take leave of his youth. They are not frolicking any more, not running around in the woods; Jeus has become serious, and Vanny—old. Then they go to the pigeons, the chickens and the pigs, not to forget the rabbits. They go through field and forest. Everywhere Jeus is experiencing a little bit of his youth again, he is looking at everything with the larger knowledge that is now within him, and critically he weighs in his mind how much he has learned through the wonderful things that have happened to him in his childhood. He has lived between heaven and earth, already when he was still lying in his

cradle. At the bottom of all this there must have been a sublime meaning, for why should his life have been so different from that of any other child? But what this meaning might be, he can not yet fathom, and what his future shall be like, he can not know, either. He feels ready for whatever this may be, for the task which his guardian angel, the long man his friend shall place upon his shoulders. He shall do his best, as God wants him to.

"So, now everything is clear to me, what? There's nothing that I'd have to find out any more. Now I can give myself over altogether to the future."

Early in the morning he is up already, mother doesn't have to wake him. He puts his short pants upon the chest, they'll be for Gerrit now. Then he sticks his legs into the long pants.

Mother and he are having breakfast together. Jeus sits on father's chair. He cannot leave his eye from mother. She understands him and bursts out laughing:

"Come on, now—do you want to imitate father?"

She is helping him into his jacket. Arm in arm they go to the door. But Mother Crisje cannot yet turn the door knob. She pulls her boy close to herself. "Will you always be careful, Jeus?" She feels a lump in her throat.

"Yes, mother." That is all he is saying. They are looking at each other and they know that their hearts shall be as one, as long as there will be a breath of life in their bodies, and still thereafter. And as they are standing there, a figure appears and comes between them, and Jeus sees that it is father.

Mother has turned the doorknob. She is looking at the opening through which her happiness has gone in and out for so many years and now her eyes are filling with tears.

Jeus is still waving at mother. As fast as he can he is now walking down the gravel road. Then he has a beautiful experience: Father is walking with him, bringing him to the factory on this, his first day. They speak no word as they are stepping ahead, but their happiness is complete. As the whistle is blowing, Jeus is standing before the factory. Father says to him:

"Now, s'long, Jeus, do your best, my boy."

"Yes, father, I'll take care of it."

Then the gate is closing behind him, cutting off his youth irrevocably.

THE END

